



Reading Room

StarWars FanFiction

POV: Something is happening in Yavin IV

By Dario "Ibero" Pozo

Pictures by Dario "Ibero" Pozo

The two A-Wings were flying at low speed, keeping in formation with a Rebel Alliance's Nebulon B Frigate, not at a very large distance. There were no other ships in the proximity and only the navigation lights of the Frigate blinking against the blackness of space could give a sensation of movement, that time was not standing still. A beautiful winged horse painted on the Frigate's hull identified it as the *Joan d'Arc*, home of White Squadron.

The A-Wing pilots were Whites 4 and 11, Peter "Iceman" Kovessy and Owen "Granite" Stone.

"I hate escort and reconnaissance missions." Granite said using the intercom. "It's more boring than a guided tour on Tatooine!"

"Do you really?" Iceman questioned as he started to laugh. "I thought you loved it..."

"Why do you suppose that?"

"Because every time Shok'wave needs someone for one of these missions, everybody can hear you whispering that you hate escort and reconnaissance missions and immediately you are assigned for the next flight."

"Yes," Granite said laughing too, "you caught me. I don't like these missions that much, but I do prefer the real thing, do you know what I mean? Even the top of the boring flights rather than the best that the simulator can offer!"

"I see your point, but today it would have been funny. Moose is almost finishing the basic training with a group of recruits. Right now is when they are full of confidence, believing they are able to shoot down entire squadrons of TIE Fighters. Moose had wanted some of us to join them in the simulator without previous warning, but flying on the Imperial side..."

"Ouch, I didn't know anything about that!" protested Granite. "It would be great, just kicking some youngsters' butts, and then see their faces when they get out of the simulator...!"

"Too late, Granite! Foxfire, Vyper and Shok'wave are having aaaaall the fun right now!"

"*How* I hate escort and reconnaissance missions!"

It took some moments before Iceman could stop laughing, while Granite's groans and colorful curses filled the intercom. Iceman sighed and decided that he had to say something to cheer up his squad mate.

"Don't worry, pal. I'm sure that in some part of the galaxy, not far from here, something is happening, something that will end the boredom..."

[In some part of the galaxy, not far from there...]

"Where is the next jump carrying us?"

"Hmmm, let me see... Yavin system, it seems. Ah, yes, I remember, hehehe. From there to Corellia there will be only two more jumps. It's far from the usual routes, but the alternatives had very high traffic and we would probably have to wait a while at one or two points for clearance. Before you start to complain, you must know that I've been working hard with the computer looking for a non-commercial path."

"Non-commercial." The co-pilot repeated arching an eyebrow.

The two men were chatting in the cockpit of the tiny yacht *Little Laura*, while preparing for their hyperspace jump. They were in the beginning of a short holiday, a little tour across the three worlds of Corellia.

"Hmmm, did you just say Yavin?" the co-pilot asked. "Isn't that the place where the Rebels beat the Imperials some time ago?"

"You and your Rebels." The pilot said. "The Empire has *never* recognized such a battle, and all the story could only be part of the Rebel's propaganda, trying to make a few dumbies like you join his cause."

Dario, the co-pilot, smiled, but he didn't really want to leave things like that between them.

"Tah-tah-tah. So are you saying that Imperial citizens are smart people because they believe all the Empire tell them and that doesn't cause any problems?" Edu, the pilot, tried to reply, but Dario didn't give him the chance. "The Empire has a propaganda department too, you know. An *entire* ministry, actually. If there had been a battle *lost* against the Rebels, do you think that they would have announced it like it was the weather news? "Good night, citizens of the Empire. Tomorrow it will rain over sectors B1 and B2 of Imperial Center. The Rebel scum has beaten the glorious Imperial Navy today in a remote place called Yavin or something. Sunny day in ..."

"Ok, ok, you win" Edu interrupted. "I admit that the Empire probably would hide news like that, but..."

"Probably?"

"... Surely, all right, but it doesn't mean that the rumor about that Rebel victory is true. And be quiet for just a minute or we'll miss the point to make the jump!"

Edu waited until the yellow light on the panel moved to green and then pushed the hyperspace motivator lever. Just when the stars became lines of light, Dario attacked again.

"So, what do you say about the Empire destroying Alderaan with it's *Death Star*?"

"The *Death Star*?" Edu laughed. "Do you believe that story about a giant space battle station, capable of destroying entire planets?"

"Well, if that is *Rebel propaganda* too," Dario replied as he tried to imitate Edu's voice, "How do you explain such a disaster?"

"Didn't you look at the reports? The media was full of them for several months. They stated that Alderaan's core was unstable and it was a question of time that a chain of earthquakes started sooner or later, blowing away the whole planet. The scientists had been warning them about that for years!"

"Are you sure about that? I can't remember any of those reports *before* the destruction of Alderaan."

"Well, I can't either" Edu said thoughtfully, "but nobody attends such reports when nothing has happened yet." Edu finished sarcastically.

"That's not what the Alderaanians we both know say. None of them..." Dario didn't finish his sentence. He realized that he was about to get angry again, and Edu didn't deserve to be the target of his rage,

not even when he spoke as a jerk.

"Hey, don't misunderstand me." Edu said peacefully. "I don't like the Empire, you can believe that!" Edu added noticing the Dario's change of expression. "I know it must be hard for you to go so long without seeing your wife."

Ten months ago, Imperial troops had taken the city of Lorance, in the planet Iberyia, where Dario and his wife Marife lived. The only explanation given by the Imperial commander was that there was a Rebel group hidden there. Following orders from the Moff of the sector, the access to Lorance had been seriously restricted, and the exit practically forbidden until the Rebels were found. The result was that the town had been kept in almost complete isolation from the external world since then. The day of the assault, Dario was out of the city assisting with Edu to a computer science conference. The two men had been working together for several years as software engineers in an important telecommunications company, where they had become great friends. Two months before the assault, Edu had moved to a different company out of the city, taking his family with him. That had saved them from suffering the same destiny than their friends. When the first news about what was happening in Lorance reached them, Dario decided to return immediately and Edu offered to drive him home. At five kilometers of Lorance, Edu had to park the rented aero-speeder out of the route, completely saturated. Thousands of people were trying to return to the town, but they were being systematically rejected by the stormtroopers controlling all the accesses. As many others did, the two men walked until the Imperial control, where Dario tried uselessly to be allowed to continue. He complained, menaced and yelled, but the most he got was to be knocked out by the carbine of a stormtrooper, who immediately trained it at him. Edu watched horrified the whole scene. He ran to lift Dario from the ground, and he had to bribe the soldiers before. Finally they allowed to leave, carrying the unconscious Dario all the way back to the place where they had left the aero-speeder. When Dario recovered conscience, he was in Edu's home, thirty kilometers away from Lorance. Immediately, he tried to call Marife, but all non-military communications had been interrupted. He couldn't find out not even if she was alive or not.

"It's not your fault, Edu." Dario said as remembrances made his anger turn into sadness. "You know

"Bah, its nothing at all, you would do the same for me." Edu put a hand on Dario's shoulder. "Hey,

"Yes, I suppose." Edu stared at him in silence for some instants and then returned his attention to the ship's controls, although there was nothing to do now. He knew that Dario would be fine in some minutes, or that he would appear from outside. He wondered how he was able to resist it. Honestly, Edu thought that in his friend's place, he would have become crazy ever since the first minute. Iberyia had never had problems with the Empire until now, at least not this serious, but there was no point in keeping pretending there was nothing wrong with it. Edu didn't fool himself, this was the same they had made in a thousand places. First, they sent troops with any excuse, troops that supposedly wouldn't stay for too long, only while they were *needed*. But of course they never found the adequate moment to leave, not even when new "refreshment" troops arrived. The local army, if any, passed from the "ally" status to be forced to integrate into the Imperial forces, and then they were sent somewhere else, thousand of parsecs from home, where they would not cause any trouble. Edu knew all that as much as his friend, but he couldn't admit it in his presence. It was bad enough as it was. Dario had tried to enter Lorance again and again, taking new risks with every attempt. Last time he had almost bought it. The fresh scar on his neck showed the point where a laser bolt had partially touched him, but that wouldn't restrain him from trying again. Edu watched all that with growing concern, feeling himself impotent to help his friend. All that Edu could do was trying to prevent him from get himself killed, and that included to tell him all these stupidities every time he started to talk about Imperials and Rebels. If he lost the hope that things would ever recover something close to normality, he would find a fancy way to commit suicide, probably more sooner than later. But Edu didn't know how he was going to convince Dario when his own words sounded so false to himself. The Empire would never leave, and no one was going to help them. *Nobody. The Rebellion can't do anything. Iberyia is too close to Coruscant for them...*

They traveled in silence until the alarm warned them that the ship was finishing the hyperspace jump. Edu turned the motivators off and they entered normal space. But they did it so briskly that both men felt smashed against their seat belts.

"Whoaaaaaaa!" Dario screamed. A red gassy giant completely filled the viewscreen. "You are such a

fool, Edu! What kind of calculations have you made? We almost crash on that..., that... planet!"



"That is Yavin. I counted with its gravity well to take us out from hyperspace on the exact location." Edu explained very satisfied with Dario's reaction. Actually he was struggling to not laugh at him.

"You did *what?*" Dario turned to look at Edu as if strangling him was the next thing he was going to do.

"There are no accurate cards of this system, so I calculated the best approximate coordinates, and expected that the planet's gravity would made us drop on the exact location. Now we'll use that same gravity to increase our speed. Three quarters of an orbit around it, and we'll be shot directly towards our next jump point, saving time and fuel. We had made a roundabout coming so far, but there are almost no obstacles from here to Corellia. Two more jumps and we'll be on the beach!" Edu announced joyfully. "Check that our position is the correct one."

"Yes, this is the Yavin system" Dario answered as he looked at the chart on the monitor, "and that red ball is the planet Yavin, but I still can't believe you are this crazy. You could have killed the two of us!"

Edu took the giggles, but recovered self-control quickly. "Not a chance, nothing as dangerous as the way *you* pilot. Just some smart navigation and a lot of technology. This little wonder is equipped with the last improvements in navigational computers. It can detect any gravity well in its route and makes the ship re-enter normal space automatically at a safe distance. Two years ago, only military ships had this kind of stuff."

Dario looked at the control panel with increasing respect. He knew such systems existed, but he ignored that they were available to public.

"You have spent a lot of money in this craft, have you?"

"I'll be paying to the bank for the next ten years, if that answers your question. But the *Little Laura* is worth the price, don't you think so?"

Dario shook his head. "I'd never be able to throw away that insane amount of credits, but I imagine you can feel as a god having your own space ship."

"Hehehe, sort of."

"Did Nuria agree with you to buy the ship?"

"Shhhhhhh, never mention it." Edu said suddenly serious. "She still thinks I've rented it for this trip. I don't know how I'm going to explain..."

Now it was Dario who laughed until it made him cough. "Ah, some times I think I don't know you at all... Don't worry, I'll let Nuria to discover the kind of fool she got married with by herself." He winked at Edu.

"Right, then." Edu returned the wink. "It will take the computer only two or three minutes to calculate the parameters for the next jump. It's your turn to pilot, so I'll have a little nap. Do you think that...?"

Edu didn't complete his question. The proximity alarm had started to sound and the two men looked at the viewscreen at the same time.

"But what..."

Something hit the little ship with an impressive noise, making more alarms come to life. The entire ship was trembling, continuously smashed by smaller objects.

"Turn those sirens off or we won't understand each other!" Dario screamed.

"Junk! The space is full of junk!" Edu exclaimed in disbelief while he disconnected some of the alarms. "Is there anyone cleaning up around here?"

"Look at that!" Dario said pointing to something that was passing in front of them. "Isn't that a solar panel from a TIE fighter?"

"Yes, it seems so." Edu said while maneuvering the ship trying not to collide into anything else. "Maybe there was a battle here after all. Oh, shit..."

Pieces of junk and debris filled the space around the *Little Laura*. Edu needed all his skill to evade all of the fragments and exit successfully out of the dangerous cloud of debris. If they had appeared closer to Yavin it would have been impossible. The sensors warned that the fragments were more numerous and greater there. Dario asked the computer for a damage report, while sweat started to run down his forehead, as always happened when he got nervous.

"Fantastic. Several hull damages and the communications antenna has disappeared" Dario read. "The computer says that it's not safe to jump to hyperspace with the hull in that shape."

"Not safe? You know what that means?" Edu asked with a note of fear in his voice. "If we can't jump to hyperspace and we can't communicate to ask for help..."

"Don't lose our nerves, Edu. Let's try to find a place to land and we'll try to make some repairs." Dario didn't say what he was thinking, *repairs, with what?*

"Repairs, with what?" Edu asked.

"One problem at a time, please! *I hate telepathy!* Look at this!" Dario pointed to the report on the monitor. "That moon, Yavin IV, shows a more than acceptable readings for atmosphere, temperature, vegetation and water. It looks like a real paradise in the tropics..."

"It will be better than space. Ok, Yavin IV then."

Amongst the spatial junk near Yavin nearly all small objects were undetectable. A small Imperial satellite blended in with the rest of the debris orbiting the giant red planet. But something had caught its attention and its programming decided that it was important enough to send a message to certain unknown coordinates.

[On board the Victory II Class Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

One of the communications officer saw the signal indicating a new long-range message had just arrived. He checked it and executed the correct decoder routine to obtain the real information from the unmeaningful sequence of signals. Within a matter of seconds he was reading the original report and calling his higher official over.

"Lieutenant Varis, you better take a look at this."

Gray Wolf, received the report from his second in command, Captain Zelia. He didn't look at his subordinate, who patiently stood escorted by an stormtrooper until Guindamonn decided to talk.



"A little ship landing in Yavin IV, just inside the ancient Rebel base. What do you think about this, Captain Zelia?"

"It would mean one of three things, sir." Zelia had his answer prepared. "First, it could be smugglers looking for something valuable amongst the debris of the Rebel base."

"Possible, but not a great chance. The Empire has kept all the data about that base as secret as possible. Even with the Rebel attempts to make the story public about the battle of Yavin, not a single smuggler has been detected in the zone in the last two years. They must think that if there were something interesting there, someone would have already removed it. Please continue."

"Second, someone has suffered an accident and has landed in Yavin IV just by luck. There is a great amount of junk floating there and a ship navigating across Yavin system could receive some damage from that."

"I'm not a man to believe in accidents, Captain. Yavin is not a highly frequented system. We might say it's not frequented at all. I would accept it as chance, though. One very remote chance. Your last idea?"

"Third, the Rebels are interested in something that they left on that base." Captain Zelia said very satisfied with himself.

"No, Captain." The smile disappeared from Captain Zelia's face. "There is nothing in that base they could miss. Our troops investigated even under the stones. But they are Rebels, of course."

Captain Zelia said nothing. He was just looking at Commander Guindamonn trying not to seem as confounded as he felt. After almost a minute, Guindamonn continued talking.

"We have been chasing the Rebels without pause after the battle of Hoth and they must be crazy looking for a permanent base where we are unable to find them." he grinned and continued. "There is no such place." He turned to look at his subordinate. "But they can think that we won't look in a location where they had been before. A place from where we had already thrown them out of. This is the reason because we have hidden satellites in Dantooine, Yavin and Hoth, for example. Of course, they are not such fools to go to one of those places and bring all their forces there without a previous

inspection. Before that, they would have to explore the site. Make certain that we had not left any traps behind and that there is not Imperial activity around it."

"And there are no traps?"

"No." Guindamonn smiled again. "Lord Vader ordered to analyze every piece of information we could obtain from the base. However, they were ordered not to destroy completely the facilities, as it unfortunately happened at Derra IV, and not to leave any traps behind. The Rebels will think that we won't believe them so foolish to return to one of their old bases, and that is precisely what Lord Vader expects them to do."

"Shall we prepare to go capture them, sir?"

"No, Captain, not yet. We must finish our present mission first, but it will take us only two or three weeks. We'll go then. Let's allow that their confidence grow. If we go now, we would obtain a little fish, but if we are patient enough, we can get the first prize."

"Then, we must inform the High Command of... "

"Wrong again, Captain!" Guindamonn hit his deck with a fist. "If there is something important there we don't want someone else taking the glory of discovery, do we?"

"No, sir. I agree with you." the Captain lied.

"We will inform, of course," Guindamonn said recovering his calm, "but we must be the first ship arriving and the first to kill some Rebels. Is that clear enough, Captain?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Zelia saluted and left that part of the bridge. Commander Guindamonn turned again towards the external viewscreens, looking at the stars with a confident smile. *What an unexpected luck! Who would have imagined? If I use adequately this opportunity, I'll be commanding an Imperial Class very soon.*

[Undetermined spot, some parsecs away from the *Gray Wolf*]

The Rebel Corvette *Curious Cat* was flying silently in the deep space, far from any star system, with minimal use of its engines. It showed no navigation lights, just a shadow with no external signs of life. But inside its hull, the *blockade runner* Intelligence Services. The operator, a white furred Bothan, called his higher officer with a wave of his hand.

"Lieutenant Dey'jeaa, look at this, please." The Lieutenant, a Bothan too, as most of the crew, looked seriously into the monitor. The report came from an Imperial satellite detached in the Yavin system. Lieutenant Dey'jeaa nodded thoughtfully, recognizing the satellite identification. It was part of a series secretly manipulated by a Rebel programmer, infiltrated in the factory of Andrellia. The handful of instructions he has managed to slice into the transmission protocols' code caused that all the messages were sent twice, one to the Imperial receivers and the other to the Rebel ones. The security department of Andrellia's facilities only ran a full test over a twenty percent of the finished satellites and the programmer was part of the team that performed the check-outs. The man was very careful to alter only the ones that he was sure that nobody else would check again later. Even with those cautions he was taking a high risk, so he was not in that job for long. Dey'jeaa had learnt that the spy, with General Madine's blessings, had accepted a change of destiny when he was suggested to by his supervisors. New devices wouldn't be hacked any more, at least while other code slicers couldn't be introduced in the assembly lines by the Alliance, but some of those reprogrammed kept providing their Intelligence officers with valuable data from time to time. The Yavin's satellite was two years old. Until now, it had showed very low activity.

"A small ship lands near our old base in Yavin," Dey'jeaa said almost talking to himself, "and nobody has gone to investigate it as of now. Hmmm... How old is this report?"

"We received it three hours ago. I've been expecting an Imperial ship to go take a look, but there has been no one so far."

"Keep a close eye on that monitor. I want to know immediately if anybody arrives there within the next twenty hours. Transmit these instructions to the next shift."

"Yes, sir. What do you think about this, sir? "

"Hmmm, the Empire uses to be very careful with the reports from its spy satellites. Its very strange that they don't send a ship to investigate that landing. They have enough ships to spare with missions like that, unlike us. I can find only one explanation. That ship is Imperial, although it sends a neutral code. That makes me wonder why the Empire is interested again in our base in Yavin. Maybe they are so desperate looking for us that they are trying to find some clue that they could have missed after we evacuated the base. It will be better to be alert to anything that satellite could say. And I'll warn Captain Gen'yaa. If we're traced back we'll be in serious trouble."

[Entering the deserted Rebel base in the Yavin system]

"It was real luck that we found this place, don't you think so?" Dario commented.

"Yes, there's no doubt." Edu answered distractedly, while the two men looked around. They were inside a great stone building, and it was evident that it had been a base for someone in the past, but it had been abandoned in a hurry. With the dim light that entered from the exterior, they could see equipment and tools forgotten in several places.

"Land the ship here, Edu. At least it will be safe from the weather. With so much vegetation, it must rain very often here."

"You are right. While I do that, try to find something as a means of light or we won't be able to do that much here."

Edu left towards the ship while Dario used the small lantern he had took from the *Little Laura* to inspect the huge hangar. There were a couple of stairs to climb into the ships abandoned on the floor, containers of different sizes, rolls of cable, flexible pipes to refuel the ships, some machinery and

If this was an Imperial base we could be in a lot of trouble! Dario thought feeling a chill. The place was too big for a real inspection with just a lantern and Dario wondered if they could find a generator in some of those containers before the lantern batteries died. He saw a lateral exit that seemed to go to another hangar and decided to try it. Local spiders had made a good work filling the corridor with its webs. Struggling against the bothersome meshes, Dario was about to give up when he noticed some light in front. He turned the lantern off and stepped forward. If there was a place with natural light the best was to search there first. Fifty meters beyond, the corridor ended in another chamber with the walls and a good portion of the floor covered by the exotic vegetation. Dario looked around stunned. Now he knew who had been the last owner of this place. He heard an engine noise at his back and went back towards the hangar. The forward lights of *Little Laura* allowed him to see a bit better.

"Keep the lights on a few minutes, Edu!" Dario shouted while walking towards the ship. "It's our only chance to find something here!"

"Ok, but we better hurry. If we use the accumulated energy from the ship we will soon run out!" Edu explained. "Hey, where had you been? You looks like if you had just escaped from the spiders queen's lunch!"

"Sort of." Dario started to remove pieces of web from his clothes, although the worst of it was on his hair. "I already know who has been here, Edu." He said while they walked to inspect the nearest container.

"Shoot."

"The Rebels!" Dario exclaimed very excited. "I've found another chamber and it's full of decorations and the remainings of certain flags... The Rebel Alliance flags! They must have had some type of celebration just before abandoning this place."

Edu remembered the conversation on board the *Little Laura* and couldn't help but smile.

"I must admit that it seems you were right." Edu said, but before Dario could say anything, he continued. "But if we can't find an energy generator we are trapped here."

"Don't worry Edu, the next container will be the right one!" They moved towards another group of containers. The first crates had been empty, but none of them wanted to abandon before checking up all of them.

"There he goes, Optimistic Man in person. Nice to see you back." Edu chuckled. He looked back towards the entrance and the jungle behind. Things didn't look too well, although he didn't want to give up without trying all their chances. The rear part of the *Little Laura* was brightening under the light entering from outside. Too bad nobody had thought about making some windows in this place. His eye caught a new reflect from the ship's hull. Edu stopped searching in the containers, something important was running through his mind.

"Come on Edu, help me open this one!"

"Wait a minute, Dario."

"What?"

"This place is really huge."

"Yes, I think so." Dario said impatiently.

"I've been looking out there and I haven't seen anything indicating the presence of a big energy generator some time in the past, but there must have been something to illuminate this place."

"Just because you haven't seen anything doesn't mean that much. With this vegetation things could be well covered by now." Dario argued.

"Yes, but... even with all the rain we suppose, all this vegetation would never grow up without a *lot* of light."

"Perfect for our vacation. We can have sun baths and..." Dario forgot the container he was trying to force open and looked at his friend. "Are you talking of solar energy?"

"Yes! They could have installed thousands of solar cells all around and over this building and many of them could be working right now!"

"If that was true, there must be a place from where they controlled the conversion to electricity. If we can find it..." Dario left the rest on the air and started to look around. Almost immediately, he felt Edu's hand on his shoulder.

"What do you think about that?" Edu asked pointing at a cabin near the cell, accessible with metallic stairs and now visible with the lights of *Little Laura*.

"That we've got to climb up there right now!"

The control panels had been covered with protective plastic. Dario thought that someone had took very seriously his work, considering that if they had evacuated the base, as it seemed obvious, the hope to recover any of that equipment was all but remote. *But thank you, whoever you were!* Edu and him took some minutes to guess how to use a good portion of the controls. They had designed software for facilities like that in the past, and had helped to install them on the client side, so nothing was entirely strange for them.

"That button." Edu said.

"What? Ah, yes... The one labeled *power*?"

"Good thinking. I see that you have not forgotten all I have taught you."

"Eh! You teaching me?"

"Could you close your mouth and push the button, please?" Edu demanded. He was trying to keep his sense of humor, but the truth was that he was too nervous to push the button himself.

"Here I go..." Dario said whispering, but his finger stopped a centimeter over the button.

"What if something explodes?" He asked. "This could be a trap..."

"All right, all right, you joker, I'll do it!" Edu pushed Dario away from the console, what didn't take a great effort for him, being considerably stronger than his friend. He smashed the button with his open palm.

Nothing happened.

"Perhaps if you try again..." Dario suggested.

"Shhh, shut up. Don't you hear anything?"

"Like a buzzing?"

"Yes, growing louder every moment... Look!"

With jumps of joy they saw how many lights started to illuminate the hangar and some of the instruments in the control cabin came to life. They discovered that a good portion of the equipment still worked. Now they could watch better what resulted to be an immense hangar. The disorder was terrible. The crates they had been opening were just a part of what could be found all over the place. The final moments of the installations could be easily guessed. The quick and hasty evacuation, the escape, and the following invasion. Someone had stayed behind to cover the withdrawal, and those people had died fighting there. Containers, columns and walls showed burns from laser bolts. Traces of little explosions, like the ones that could be caused by thermal grenades, could be easily appreciated here and there. It was a violent but short fight. The resistance had been too weak as to cause too much trouble to the assaulting troops, which Dario didn't doubt they were Imperials.

"I wonder why they didn't destroy the whole place." Edu said.

"I was thinking exactly the same. There was a fight, but then they just left..."

"It doesn't make any sense." Edu shook his head. "Well, let's go back down there and continue searching. Perhaps there will be something we'll be able to use." Edu went to the stairs and started to descend. "I'll go first to turn the ship's lights off and..."

"Look at that, Edu, in that corner!" Dario yelled from the cabin.

"What?" Edu stopped and looked in the direction Dario was signaling. He saw it immediately and could hardly believe it. "It seems that they forgot that one..."

In one corner of the hangar was a lonely Y-Wing, and from where they were standing it seemed to be intact. It was the old model, made for a crew of two men, the pilot and the weapons operator.

"Maybe we could obtain some pieces from it to repair *Little Laura*!" Edu exclaimed and the two men ran down the stairs towards the abandoned fighter.

They inspected the ship carefully, from the inside out. After some minutes, Edu had a diagnostic evaluation.

"It has the hyperspace motivator fried by a laser shot. That was probably the reason they left it here. But the rest seems ok."

"The comms probably works," Dario said from the cockpit "but we can't send a transmission with good chances of success from here. Nobody will receive us in this remote system, unless more dumbs are looking for shortcuts out there..."

"You're not going to let that pass, are you? Well, we can remove the antenna from the fighter and try to install it on the *Little Laura*, but the hull damages will require hard work. That is if we find some soldering equipment and instructions to operate it, of course!"

"Take a better look at *Little Laura's* damages." Dario said. "There could be something we haven't noticed yet. While you do that, I'll explore the facilities better, now that we have light, and I'll try to find all we need."

Three hours later, Dario was back in the hangar and he joined Edu near *Little Laura*.

"I was starting to worry about you..." Edu said. "I've finished with all the crates here. The best I've found is a pack of campaign rations. We would not starve in six months." Edu omitted what didn't need to be said, that he hoped they wouldn't need all that time. There was tension in his voice when he made his question. "Have you found anything else?"

"Nothing in the form of soldering equipment, I'm afraid."

"Then we are doomed." Edu said sadly, all his hope almost lost in a second. "I've performed a complete check with the computer and the cracks in the hull are severe. Some of them can be seen even with the naked eye."

"That bad?" Dario sighed. "Well, then we'll have to use plan B."

"I didn't even know there was a plan B."

"There is now. I haven't found any soldering equipment, but there are many things that the Rebels didn't have time to take with them. Amongst them, complete manuals for the Y-Wing and a flight simulator. It works, I've checked it out."

"Are you talking about flying with that Y-Wing?" Edu asked with his eyes widely opened.

"And what else? You have said that it only has a damaged hyperspace engine motivator. We could try to adapt the one from *Little Laura* they had."

"Ok, suppose we are able to do that." He said at last. "The computer of that fighter can't do hyperspace calculations by itself. It needs an astromech droid, I believe. If you haven't found one, then we have nothing at all."

"We have no droid, yes, but we only need to make *one* jump. From here to the next inhabited system..."

"Ah, yes, I see what you are thinking about." Edu nodded while looking alternatively to both ships. "We do the calculations with *Little Laura's* computer, download the results over the Y-Wing's computer and we jump to a place from where we can ask for help."

"You got it. And we have the flight simulator to learn how to pilot one of these." Dario said with a big smile. "I fear that we'll pass our holidays working."

"Not a problem at all. I don't like the beach that much anyway." Edu said with resignation and hope at the same time. "I'll begin to dismount that hyperspace motivator right now. That is something I have to do on my own."

"I'm sorry for you having to do that to your ship," Dario said in sympathy with his friend, "but we'll return for it later."

"That's the last of my concerns right now." They looked each other in silence for some moments. They were no blind to the seriousness of their situation, but they agreed without words in doing their best to come out of it with good. It was Dario who broke the silence with a chuckle.

"All right, I'll look at what I can make of that simulator. I'm a better pilot than you, you know."

"You're a better nothing than me, that's what I know." Edu snorted, but he smiled at his friend. "Have fun."

It was not premeditated, but that was the way of working for the next days. Edu took the hard part of repairing the Y-Wing with pieces from *Little Laura*, sometimes aided by Dario. Meanwhile, Dario filled his time with the flight simulator, showing Edu from time to time the things he was discovering. Edu's job was the toughest so far, but he didn't complain. He felt guilty for choosing a path away from the commercial routes, and for not being able to avoid the accident. An accident that would never have taken place if he had not made his bold approach to Yavin, in the first place, as he repeated to himself in his worst moments. But he had a more important reason to work as he was doing. He was thinking every single minute of his wife, Nuria, and their daughter, Laura, only one year old. He couldn't help but thinking again and again *What if I can't see them again?* and that made him sick. He used to remember them just before starting this trip. Nuria standing with Laura in her arms, talking with him while Dario finished loading the ship.

"Are you sure about not coming with us?" Edu asked.

"Yes, dear. We better stay here." Nuria noticed his expression and decided to explain the reasoning behind her decision. "Have you observed Dario these last months? He is dying by sadness, Edu! Do you remember the last time he told you a joke? He was one of the funniest persons I've ever met, and now he is only his shadow!" Edu turned his head to see Dario while loading the baggages and said nothing.

"If Laura and I go with you," Nuria continued "he won't be able to put out of his mind that Marife is not with him. Maybe if you two are alone, you could have some fun, and he could recover some."

Edu sighed and look towards Dario again.

"You are right. This is something we have to do. Have I told you how much I love you and how much I am going to miss you and Laura?"

"I hope you do. Call me from Corellia."

"That will be the first thing I'll do there! And I'll buy the biggest gift I can find for you!" Edu said while kissing Laura.

"Ooky, Dad, ooky!" Laura said at the best of her ability. Edu looked at her puzzled.

"Ooky?"

"Laura wants a Wookiee!" Nuria translated.

"A Wookiee it is then!" Edu said and kissed them again.

Dario came to say good bye, and the two friends parted towards the ship.

"I'll call you, I promise!" Edu shouted before closing the external door.

Edu was remembering now how Laura was waving her little hand, and Nuria smiling at him. Now they would be waiting for a call that he could not make. He was going to repair that Y-Wing. Of course he would.

Dario was thinking too of his wife Marife. Ten months. Ten months not knowing even if she was alive. He didn't blame Edu for the accident. He understood what his best friend was passing through better than anybody else. Dario was feeling some guilt too, because he knew this travel was for him, and furthermore, he was evading the hard work and enjoying the simulator instead. Yes, *enjoy* was the correct word. Supposedly, he only needed to learn the basic stuff, but he couldn't just stop when he was able to pilot decently an Y-Wing. He decided to have the full packet and learn all he could about astro-navigation and space combats as well. He only stopped to have some hours of sleep, and only remembered to eat when his stomach started to complain noisily. Gradually he got used to the tactic computer, the different weapons and the shields. He practiced one maneuver after another, until he was able to catch up with his computer-generated trainer. After the first week, the artificial intelligence that piloted the enemy ships was not a terrible adversary any more, and he began with the hardest scenarios. It was easy to forget that everything was just a simulation. Sometimes, when the debriefing report scrolled across the screen informing of his scores, Dario closed his eyes and dreamt. He was the hero who destroyed all the Imperial forces there in Iberyia, landing at last in front of his home, just to be embraced by Marife...

[Two weeks later, ISD *Gray Wolf's* bridge]

"Captain Zelia..." Commander Guindamonn said approaching his second in command.

"Yes, sir."

"Anything new from our satellite in Yavin?"

"No, sir." Zelia replied. "Not a single ship has arrived or parted from the system."

"Strange, very strange indeed... If there are Rebels now in Yavin IV, I would expect *some* traffic in the system. Only a ship landing and it remains there, but what if...?" Guindamonn interrupted while an idea had touched his mind.

"Have you reached a conclusion, sir?" Zelia asked."

"...What if that ship had the mission to manipulate or disable our satellite?" Guindamonn continued like if Zelia hadn't said anything.

"Our satellite is working, sir." Zelia said. "I ordered the communications officer to send it an interrogation message, and it has replied with normality."

"Then that satellite has been manipulated or there are no Rebels at all." The anger in his voice was more than evident. For the last weeks he had been looking forward to the moment when they would return to Yavin to fall on their prey. The mere thought that there may be no prey after all was a cold shower for his ambitions. *Don't anticipate yourself. Let's see that satellite first.* "Captain Zelia, bring the *Gray Wolf* to the Yavin system, and when we arrive, send a transport to recover the satellite. Our technicians will say if we have something to worry about."

"At once, sir."

[Onboard the Nebulon B Frigate *Joan d'Arc*]

The *Joan d'Arc* was flying with his usual escort of two A-Wings, one of them piloted by Diana "Joker" Agar and the other by Owen "Granite" Stone, who had complained again about the escort and reconnaissance missions. At least this flight counted with the extra distraction of Joker's most recent repertory, although after the first two hours, Granite thought he had had all the jokes about Gamorrean stormtroopers he could resist in a whole life span. He was fully aware that if he said at the

woman what he really thought about her jokes it could only become worse, so he kept his mouth closed. *Next time I'll do just that...*



In the Rebel Frigate's bridge, a message was being received.

"Captain Orris," the Communications officer began. "we are just receiving a classified transmission for you."

"All right, officer. Redirect it to my private room please."

"At once sir."

Captain Rahne Orris went to his room, and saw a red light blinking in his console, indicating the transmission was already waiting for him. He pushed the button to accept it and keyed his passcode, and immediately a hologram show him a blonde bearded man, with an uniform of General.

"Nice to see you, Captain." General Crix Madine began. One of the more brightening minds of the Rebel Alliance, he was chief of its Intelligence Services. He had been occupying an important position in the Imperial Intelligence until the destruction of Alderaan by the Death Star. Then he vanished and reappeared a couple of months later offering his services to the Alliance. The simple fact that he had known how to contact Mon Mothma's people showed how well informed he was. Why he hadn't used that knowledge to destroy the Alliance when he had the chance was the first question his interrogators made to him, but it was a mystery for him, too. "Probably in my subconsciousness I wanted you Rebels to win" was the best answer he was able to give. Anyway, that conscious or not sympathy toward the Alliance was not the less of the reasons for him to be allowed in the Rebel Intelligence ranks. Once there, he quickly climbed to the responsibility positions until he was offered the leadership by Mon Mothma herself. He seemed to find a lot of satisfaction turning the Empire's arms against itself. The bounty offered by the Empire for his head was only slightly lower than what they would pay for Mon Mothma's. Captain Orris knew all that, and it made him to pay all his attention to the General's words.

"Nice to see you too, General." He said. Madine and him had worked together once in the past, right after Madine's desertion, and had kept some contact ever since. They hadn't gotten as close as to be considered good friends, but sometimes, when they were in privacy they even omitted the ranks. Orris could tell from the General's attitude that this was not just a friendly call, although Madine's smile suggested the opposite. "Is it safe to assume that you are not sending a classified transmission just to talk about old times?"

"You always getting directly to the point, my friend." *And you always being as twitched as a Devaronian snake*, Orris couldn't help but think, with a slight trace of amusement. "But you are right, of course." He ceased smiling and that was a signal for Orris that the real stuff was coming behind. "Two weeks ago, one of our ships received a message from an Imperial satellite, one we had hacked, detached in the Yavin system." Orris arched an eyebrow when he heard that name, unforgivable for every member of the Alliance. "A little ship, unidentified but supposedly civilian, landed on our old base in Yavin IV. The Imperials must have received that same transmission, but not a single ship was sent to investigate. Until now. Just one hour ago, the satellite informed that a Victory II Class Star Destroyer, the *Gray Wolf*, had exited from hyperspace and launched an armored transport directly towards its position. We have lost the contact, so we don't know what is happening there, but obviously we must assume that our manipulation over the satellite has been discovered by now. I've ordered the ship that was tracking its signal to abandon its actual position as a security measure. Now we need to know what the Imperials are doing there, and you are the nearest ship. But you must be cautious, and not to expose the *Joan d'Arc* if you can avoid it. Perhaps someone from White Squadron could do a recon without being detected, but I'll let you and your people to decide the better way to accomplish the mission." The Captain repressed an impulse to say ironically *thanks*. "If there is *immediately*. Even before informing High Command. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir." Orris frowned. He didn't like to receive that kind of suggestions, even from Madine. At least he had not said *"instead informing High Command"*. Intelligence always played on its own rules, and everybody accepted that was the way things must be. He decided to put aside that point and concentrated on the practical details. "What if the Star Destroyer is alone?"

"In that case White Squadron can perform a raid and try to destroy it. Even if they fail, that may make the Imperials think that we are interested still in the Yavin system, and that would be an excellent distraction maneuver. We need that now *more than ever*."

"Something about the rumor of a second Death Star, General?" Orris ventured.

"A second...?" If the General was hiding something, he covered it very well. "I hope not, what a thing! But if you hear that rumor again, please, *tell me*." There was no humor in Madine's smile.

"Of course, sir." Orris admonished himself in silence. He didn't use to comment rumors, even less with his higher officers, but this one was giving him chills since he caught a comment behind a closing door, the last time he was summoned to the temporary Alliance Headquarters, aboard the cruiser *Home One*, a month before. That the door itself belonged to a meeting room, where Admiral Ackbar was in conversation with his staff, was what made him think it was not a joke.

"We'll do our best, sir."

"I know, my friend, I know." The General smiled again, this time sincerely. "Good luck, Captain." He said while the transmission was finalized.

[Inside the operations briefing room of the *Joan d'Arc*]

"And that's all General Madine said." Captain Orris finished his exposition of the situation, although he obviously omitted the last part of the conversation. His audience was composed by White Squadron's commander, Sherry "Shok'wave" Krenzel, and her staff: the Executive Officer Avery "Foxfire" Schroeder, the Intelligence Officer Michael "Vyper" Stauber, the Tactical Officer Michael "Torpedo" Steinberg and the Training Officer Lewis "Moose" Gregory.

"What do you think about this, Michael?" Shok'wave asked.

"I agree with General Madine's conclusion about the first ship." Vyper said. "If it had not been Imperial, they would have sent a patrol to investigate. You can think that Imperials could know that they were smugglers or something like that and don't care about them, but now we have the Star

Destroyer and the transport picking up the satellite, and that supports the first hypothesis. What they are doing there several years after the battle of Yavin, I don't know. That base was fully investigated then, and Imperials are very careful with that, so I don't think they could be searching for a missed clue about the Alliance."

"We'll have to send someone to take a look." Shok'wave said.

"But without the satellite you won't know if there are more ships now." Captain Orris argued. "It could be dangerous, and probably you would discover that out too late."

"A fighter could exit from hyperspace far from Yavin," Foxfire proposed, "and do the rest of the travel in normal space. That would take more time, but it would be more uneasy for the Imperials to detect it. At great range and using the more powerful lenses we have available, it could even take some pictures to support the readings and return unnoticed."

"Only if the Imperials never look in his direction." Moose commented. "That's not all. If you want to be sure that your exit from hyperspace is not detected, and considering the distance that a Star Destroyer's sensors can cover, it would be a travel of almost... 36 hours in normal space," while speaking, Moose was introducing new calculations on a portable datapad, "... and 36 more for the return. Too much time for a fighter, we would need to equip it with supplementary oxygen depots."

"Even doing that..." Shok'wave said, "72 hours is too much time. Things could change completely even in the middle of that time. The reports obtained by the recon wouldn't be usable. "

"And what about a new satellite?" Torpedo asked. Before anyone could reply, he continued. "A B-Wing could exit from hyperspace at the opposite face of Yavin, where there is a better chance to do it without coming into contact with any Imperials, and hidden from their sensors by the planet mass and magnetic field, leave a satellite and return. We know that Yavin's orbit is full of debris from the *Death Star*, so if we put a satellite there in stationary orbit, amongst the junk, after some hours it would pass in front of Yavin IV, and send us some accurate readings in just milliseconds. With a transmission so reduced, it probably wouldn't be noticed."

"That presents a considerable risk, too." Vyper said. "You are assuming there will be no Imperial ships patrolling the opposite face of Yavin. Believe me, they are not stupid."

"But with some luck, it could work." Foxfire said, before Torpedo had a chance to reply. She looked at the Intelligence Officer. "I think it's our best chance. Do you have other ideas?" Vyper shrugged as the only answer.

"Someone else have other ideas?" Shok'wave extended the question to the rest of the assembly. The silence that followed was eloquent enough. There wouldn't be a better plan.

"I can do it." Moose finally said. "It will be refreshing to leave the simulators and the recruits for some hours."

Captain Orris nodded and looked at Shok'wave. "Commander?"

"Yes, sir." Shok'wave said. "Go prepare yourself. Foxfire, inform everyone that we may have some action soon and to be on alert."

"It's about time..." Foxfire said while departing.

"I'll have my technicians begin working on the satellite right now." Orris said. "You'll have it within one hour or someone is going to have a *bad time* with me."

None of the pilots doubted that Captain Orris would have the satellite prepared in time.

[Onboard the Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

"You were right, sir." the technician said. He was showing two parallel series of numbers. "The satellite has been manipulated. It has been sending its transmissions to to these coordinates."

"I did know it." Commander Guindamonn said closing his hand in a fist. "Captain Zelia, send a message to the Fleet Command. Tell them that we think that there might be a spy ship at that location, but don't tell them any more. Not yet."

"At once, sir."

"Ah, Captain," Guindamonn said. "I want images of the Rebel base immediately."

"Yes, sir. I've already ordered that."

"Well done, Captain."

[Space close to Yavin]

Moose was ending his short travel through hyperspace. The new satellite was in a small container under the B-Wing. In just a few minutes he will be at the mission objective. He had crossed his way with Vyper's when he was heading to the *Joan d'Arc's* bay. "Be careful" he had said ominously, making Moose feel a sudden shiver. He knew of the Intelligence officer's reservations about this mission, but he hoped it would be only his usual pessimism. *All ex-Imperials are the same*, he thought trying to cheer himself up. Foxfire had also said that of "be careful", but the way she did so had nothing to do with Vyper's. "Don't worry for me, babe." He had answered. That use of the word "babe" had earned him a painful squeeze in his arm, but he had loved to see that she cared. *Don't worry for me*, he thought. "Babe" he added with a twisted smile.

[Onboard the Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

"There are no external signs of activity, sir, " the Imperial Lieutenant began, "but we are receiving some energy readings."

"Did the altered programming of the satellite allow it to hide some of the ships it detected?" Asked Guindamonn to the chief of the technicians, who had been ordered to stay on the bridge."

"We don't know yet, sir. The satellite program is big and very complicated. It will take some time to check it entirely, but I don't think so. Such an evident manipulation would show up by now."

"Hmmm, maybe there is only a small group." Guindamonn said. "Captain Zelia, I want TIE patrols covering the entire system. If there are no more of them around, we'll send some troops to that damned base."

[Space close to Yavin]

The B-Wing piloted by Moose exited from hyperspace very near from Yavin. He immediately entered into the cloud of debris that orbited the giant planet, reducing his speed as soon as he considered safe doing so. He didn't want to smash against a ten meters piece of hull, and there were plenty of them turning around the gassy planet. *That damned Death Star was big* he thought with apprehension. The computer beeped twice, indicating he had reached the optimal orbit the techs had calculated for placing the satellite. He pushed the button that opened the container and left the small device floating amongst the junk. Sixteen hours later, it would be in a position from where it could observe Yavin IV and the Imperial vessels. He was starting to leave when the sensors detected ships approaching. Three TIE fighters. The metallic fragments floating all around the B-Wing would give him some more seconds before he could be detected by the Imperial fighters. Moose had only a few

seconds to make a decision. Without a second thought, his hands flew over the controls, disconnecting all the systems except the oxygen supply and the passive sensors. When he finished, the B-Wing was now like any other piece of junk turning around Yavin, very close to the satellite, but in a different orbit that was making the distance grow slowly between them. The Rebel ship could only be detected visually, but that unavoidably would happen if those TIEs got closer. *Please, don't look in this direction!*

[In the hangar of the deserted Yavin IV base]

"I got it!" Dario exclaimed. He pulled the stick back and exited from the narrow trench. He directed all the energy to the engines and escaped from the *Death Star* with all the speed that its engines could give him. Looking over his shoulder he saw a huge explosion. The message "MISSION COMPLETE" filled the display. That was the last mission that the simulator had available, and surely it was used to train the pilots who attacked the *Death Star*. Dario had needed dozens of attempts before he succeeded, and he was aware that the real mission would have been more difficult. He wondered how the real pilot felt who looked over his shoulder to see the real *Death Star* explode.

"I did it!" Edu said entering into the simulator room, interrupting Dario's thoughts. "I think that Y-Wing is ready to fly at last!"

"Are you sure?" Dario asked his excited friend, while opening the simulator's canopy.

"How could I be?" Edu replied. Only now Dario noticed the bags under his friends' eyes, and realized how hard he had been working on that fighter. "We'll have to go up there and try. A specialized technician would have needed only one or two days to do what has taken me two weeks, and be reasonably confident about the result, but I think it will work."

"We'll cross our fingers." Dario said as he smiled. "When do we take off?"

"Give me a couple of hours to transfer the fuel from the *Little Laura* to the Y-Wing and test the systems one more time. And one more thing... We were finishing our trip when the accident happened, so there was not too much remaining fuel. That baby's engines will consume it faster than the *Little Laura* *must* work the first time."

[Onboard the Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

"Sir, the patrols have been searching through the entire system," Captain Zelia informed, "but they haven't found anything yet. Some fighters have received damages because of all the spatial junk."

Commander Guindamonn was visibly angry. He beat on the nearest console, causing the young





"We are going to finish with this waste of time. Order Captain Wertens to send a squadron of his troops to the surface of Yavin IV. And I want them to bring our four AT-AT walkers."

"At once, sir," Zelia replied. He was glad to have a reason to leave the bridge.

[Onboard the Nebulon B Frigate *Joan d'Arc*]

"Fifteen hours." Shok'wave said nervously. "Moose should have been back fifteen hours ago!"

"There must be some reason, Sherry." Foxfire said, trying to transmit a hope that she had lost some hours ago. No one else could be as worried as she was, but she had learned to accept that tragedy was a part of her life. She wanted to yell, to cry, to break something, but she knew she wouldn't do any of that. Not now, at least. Nobody had noticed she had got two broken nails, as hard as she kept her fists clenched. That pain was welcome. It helped to forget the other one.

The time passed slowly on the *Joan d'Arc*, while waiting for Moose to return. Everybody was tense, from the technicians to the rest of the pilots of White Squadron, including the ship's crew and Captain Orris as well. Nobody had left the bridge during the last ten hours. The Training Wing members were the most visibly affected of all. They were looking at the external visors in a futile attempt to see Moose's B-Wing appear. Moose was the man who was teaching them how to be a pilot, but that was not the only thing they were learning from their instructor. Moose was showing them every day the meaning of being part of the Rebel Alliance, the objective that was behind the never ending sessions in the simulators, the reason to risk their own life piloting a dangerous starfighter against the fire from the Imperial ships, hoping to bring the freedom to the rest of the intelligent beings of the galaxy. Nobody ignored that their instructor was an Alderaanian. All the cadets were in the Frigate's bay, looking to the space not far from the point where Shok'wave and Foxfire were talking. Close enough to hear Shok'wave's reply.

"No, Avery. The only answers I can find are that Moose has either been captured, killed or has suffered a fatal accident between the junk orbiting Yavin. We must start to think that he is dead." Foxfire had to look in other direction. That was what logic suggested, but she would have preferred that Shok'wave had come up with a less definitive answer. Moose and her had been so prudent with their relationship that most of their squad mates ignored there was one, but Shok'wave had known from the beginning. Besides being friends, it was hard to hide something like that to someone with her sensitiveness to the Force, although Foxfire thought that Shok'wave's powers came and go, and she was far from having a full control over them. Nevertheless, she couldn't ignore the effect that her words were having on her. Shok'wave was not for one to feed false hopes, and that might be good for her, but Foxfire wouldn't believe Moose had suffered any harm while there was no physical evidence. *Moose is a tough guy, what a hell.*

Behind the two women, others were not as optimistic as Foxfire. Lisa "Angelrose" Hull tried to hold back the tears when she heard White Leader's words. Alex "Grizzly" Klingerman took her by the shoulders, fighting himself with his own emotions. Everybody raised their eyes to Shok'wave when

"This is Commander Krenzle." Shok'wave didn't even let the communicator beep twice. "Any news about Captain Gregory?"

"No, I'm sorry, Commander." the Communications officer began, "but we have just received the transmission from the satellite. Captain Gregory managed to put it into position." Shok'wave and Foxfire looked at each other.

"Everyone to the briefing room. Order the patrol team to land and refuel their fighters. Angelrose, Grizzly, pick your helmets and take an A-Wing. You will make the next escort turn." The two trainees ran to their closets. "Bay officer, when the escort team have landed, send them immediately to the briefing room."

"All right, Commander!"

[Space around Yavin]

It had been fifteen hours since Moose first disconnected almost all of the B-Wing's devices, including the heating system. The temperature had been decreasing without pause. Every breath from Moose came out in a cloud of vapor when leaving his mouth. The frozen pilot was trying to make some heat rubbing his body with his hands, but inside the black gloves, he couldn't even feel his fingers. The red dots had been permanently walking between the left and the right display, but the Imperial fighters had never been far enough to allow him to reconnect the systems and fly away. *I would love to see Iceman here right now* Moose thought *We could even probably change our callsigns around....* The B-Wing's chronometer, one of the few instruments he had left working, signaled slowly the pass of the seconds. *If the satellite is working, they must be receiving the data right now. I expect that no more ships have arrived, or nobody will come, and I'll become a nice ice statue.* He exhaled deeply and saw how the humidity of his breath condensed in a white cloud. *I hope not to forget smiling.*

[White Squadron's briefing room]

"It seems that you were right." Torpedo said before entering the briefing room. Vyper turned to face the Tactical officer.

"I don't celebrate that."

"I know, but if we all had heard you, we would not have lost Moose."

Vyper shook his head. "Don't even think of it. None of us was able to come up with a better idea. Most of times there are no safe plans, and all of them mean some risk for the people involved. Moose volunteered for this mission, and for all we know he succeeded." Both men stared at each other for some moments. "Success doesn't mean necessarily surviving the mission." Vyper added.

"I know all that, but I wanted to hear it from you." Torpedo gave Vyper a soft slap on his shoulder and entered the briefing room. Vyper followed him after an instant wondering what had been all that about. Perhaps Torpedo just wanted to calm his conscience, or re-affirm his confidence on his own tactical skills. On the other hand, he might be interested on knowing if those skills were being questioned, or even be sure that Vyper was not going to inform by official conduct about his previous warnings. Vyper shook his head. He must be becoming paranoid with age.

Captain Orris and Shok'wave had summoned all the squadron, including the Training Wing, to this briefing. The Captain had immediately informed General Madine about what their satellite had found out, and he had confirmed his previous instructions: In absence of more capital ships, White Squadron must attack the Star Destroyer. Shok'wave made a methodical exposition of all the data they had received. The pilots looked with interest at the pictures displayed on the holo-visor. They showed a lonely Victory II Class Star Destroyer floating over Yavin IV, and some TIE fighters flying here and there.

"As all of you can see, there is only a capital ship." Shok'wave was saying. "It's a Victory II Class Star Destroyer, identified by our Intelligence as the *Gray Wolf*. We don't know how long it will remain there, and if there are more ships coming. We must act right now. Torpedo, please..." Shok'wave said as she passed the pointer to her Tactical Officer.

"If the satellite was able to send these pictures, it means that it has not been discovered and we can

count on the option of surprising the Imperials with our attack." Torpedo said. He was thinking that if Moose had been shot down, there would be no chance to surprise them, but it was better to omit that thought. "We'll launch an attack using six B-Wings to destroy the Star Destroyer, and six A-Wings to protect them from the three fighter squadrons that a ship like that can have available, probably all of them TIE Fighters and Interceptors. If there are TIE Advanced things can become tricky."

"It was not *two* squadrons for a Victory Class?" Hardrive asked.

"Vyper?" Torpedo addressed to White Squadron's Intelligence officer. As a former Imperial pilot, his experience in these cases was an obligatory reference.

"This is not a standard Victory, Nik, but a Victory II. The modifications from the original design include double armor on its hull, stronger shields, more turbo-lasers and a different disposition for the hangars. When I was with the Black Knights we were able to pack up to four squadrons in a Victory II. Two keep being the standard specifications, but you can't count on them."

"More questions about this particular subject?" Hardrive gulped and sank into his seat. As member of the Training Wing he was not probably to be in this mission, so he might as well kept silent for the rest of the briefing. None of the other pilots said a word, although he could heard Joker's low chuckle on his back.

"The Escort Team" Shok'wave continued, "will be composed of Iceman, Tempest, Psycho, Granite, Vyper and Foxfire, who will be the team's leader. The Assault Team will be composed of Daolaris, Marauder, Joker, Zeppelin, Torpedo and myself as leader." Joker opened her mouth in disbelief. She hadn't expected to be called either, but obviously she was wrong. In the front row of seats, Hardrive turned his head towards her and grimaced.

"The first target for the Assault Team will be these communications arrays, here and here." Torpedo signaled two points of the Star Destroyer's superstructure with his pointer. "Daolaris and Zeppelin, this will be your objective." The Twi'lek woman and the human nodded.

"Those are your targets, here, the parabolic antenna over the bridge, and here, the bigger one close to the main hangar bay. If you are fast enough, they should not have time to ask for reinforcements from out of the system. Before you have had a chance to reach the antennas, Shok'wave and myself will be attacking the shield generators, shooting two missiles against each tower. Speed is essential, so Joker and Marauder will shoot against the same target just after us, two missiles on each one. Three use to be enough for each tower, you know, but it's better to be sure. Many of you already know what I'm about to explain, but I'll mention it in the benefit of the trainees. Why don't we just shoot some torpedoes at the shield generators from a safe distance, as we are going to do with its warhead launchers?" There were some nods between the cadets. Most of them had been wondering that. "As you can easily imagine, shields strength is higher around the generators, so high that a laser shot or even a warhead launched from outside an area of, say, two hundred meters, will be moved off from its route when it is still very far from them. We must penetrate that area if we want to hit those towers, so close that there won't be room for them to be deviated, and aim very carefully to the very center of the domes, or the torpedoes will miss the target exactly the same. If they were less effective, they wouldn't use them. As Captain Stauber use to say, *Imperials are not stupid.*" Vyper grimaced when he heard that last remark, and he couldn't help but smile.

"Next target for all of us will be the engines." The Tactical officer continued. "Don't spare your torpedoes shooting at those thrusters until the shields have fallen. This way the effect will be bigger. The secondary objective will be the main bay. The A-Wing team will launch all their concussion missiles against the warhead launchers and the laser towers from medium range. I know this is not the normal use for the concussion missiles, but we need to leave that Star Destroyer with the minimum amount of weapons possible before all of us are in short range. It's very important to coordinate the launching. This way, the first warheads will weaken the shields, while the next ones will be able to actually reach their targets. A tenth of a second of delay, and the shields will recover enough to resist the second wave of missiles. All the fight will be very near of that ship, actually too near. When you have shot those missiles, don't even wait for the impact, instead automatically engage every enemy fighter you have in sight."

"Two last remarks." Shok'wave said. "If a new capital ship appears while we are there, don't engage, and be alert if I or whomever is at command..." all the pilots knew what that would mean, "give the order of retreat! Second, Captain Orris has received orders to keep the *Joan d'Arc* out of the fight",

she said with a nod towards the Captain, "so don't expect any help from it." Some pilots exchanged concerned looks. "Any question?"

"Yes, ma'am." Granite said showing a hand up. "Why can't I be in the Assault group and...?"

"Because you've got an impressive amount of flight hours on A-Wing lately, that's why."

"But..."

"And because I've decided it." Shok'wave fulminated Granite with her eyes, and the Caldanian pilot decided this was not a good moment to argue with her.

"Ok, people, that will be all. Board your fighters and may the Force be with you." Shok'wave said. "Joker..., please stay behind a second."

"Yes, Commander?" Joker questioned while the rest of her comrades were leaving the briefing room, Granite audibly groaning.

"It has been a while since your last combat mission." Joker nodded. She had been in the Training Wing since the creation of the squad, although she had seen a lot of combat in her previous unit, the tragically disappeared *Mantis Squadron*. Shok'wave, Foxfire, Angelrose and herself were all that remained now from it. Joker had been a decent B-Wing pilot, but she was having trouble dominating the impulsive A-Wing, and that was the only reason that was keeping her between the trainees. She was not the only case. Hardrive, for example, was a hotshot on an A-Wing, but he had a worrying tendency to crash the B-Wing on the simulations. The orders were that all pilots should master both fighters, so they both had been trapped in the Training Wing for their desperation. "I've included you in this mission because we need someone to cover Moose's place, and you are the best B-Wing pilot between his trainees." Shok'wave smiled reassuringly. "Make Moose feel proud of you. I'm glad to have you again on my side."

"Thanks, Sherry. I'll do my best." Joker answered and began to run towards the bay. She was pale, with a storm of thoughts and feelings in her head. Moose probably dead, her first combat mission after almost a year... no time for that now. She would think about that *when* she was back.

Shok'wave started to exit too, when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Be careful out there, Commander." Captain Orris said. Shok'wave stopped surprised. Captain Orris and her had never done very well together since he took the command of the *Joan d'Arc*. *Incompatibility of characters* would be the most adequate definition. They respected each other, and worked together when they had to, but that didn't include too much closeness. This time she detected a trace of real concern in the man's voice, and that somewhat made her soften her attitude.

"I always am, Captain. Don't forget to take care of the *d'Arc* while we're away!" Shok'wave replied with a forced smile and then parted, leaving Captain Orris looking at the door while it closed. He exited a few seconds later and took the bridge's path. These were going to be some long hours.

[Onboard the Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

"Sir, I have a message from the Frigate *Punisher*." the Communications Officer began. "They had been performing a complete search on the coordinates we provided, but they haven't found any ship around. They want to know what is happening."

Commander Guindamonn cursed in silence.

"Reply that we are performing our own search, and we'll communicate with them when we have a positive contact."

"Yes, sir."

We are running out of time Guindamonn thought.

"Is there a report from Captain Wertens?" Guindamonn asked.

"Yes, sir. His armored transports are parting as we speak. He estimates twenty minutes to landing point on Yavin IV, and twenty more to deploy the troops and the AT-ATs, sir."

"Excellent. In forty minutes we'll know if there is something to hunt down there."

[In the hangar of the deserted Yavin IV base.]

"You haven't told me what our destiny is." Edu said.

"I've been questioning the *Little Laura's* here in only one jump." Dario explained. While he spoke, he was connecting all the Y-Wing's systems. "There were only five, and I've chosen Sullust."

"But Sullust had joined the Rebellion, hadn't they...?"

"Yes. And that is the reason of my election. You don't want to appear in a system controlled by the Empire in a Rebel Y-Wing, do you?"

"Eeeer... no, I don't. I suppose." He hadn't thought about that aspect of the situation until now, as busy as he was trying to fix the hyperspatial capabilities of the crippled fighter.

"All the systems show green status." Dario said from the forward seat. "Time to cross those fingers."

"I've already done that." Edu sighed and checked that his seat belt was as tight as it could be.

"Ok, let's go..."

Dario completed the sequence to put the engines on and the sound filled the hangar.

"Well, I had tried that before." Edu shouted to be heard over the noise. They had found no helmets, so they had installed the two headphone sets the *Little Laura* was provided with. At least they would be able to use the comms. "Now comes the frightening part."

Dario closed the canopy, what eliminated most of the noise, and connected the repulsors. The Y-Wing jumped from the frame that was holding the ship and threatened to collide with the ceiling.

"Slowly, slowly!" Edu screamed.

"I'm sorry. There was not a lot of training procedures for free take off operations. There was always someone managing a tractor beam..." Dario said apologizing. He pushed the throttle slightly and the fighter started to move forward. He was still using the repulsors, so the ship didn't stop to climb, and when they went through the huge entrance they were very near to the ceiling. The two men sighed when they left the hangar behind them.

"Maybe I should be the pilot?" Edu said.

"Too late for that. And don't be complaining all the time, ok? I can easily eject your seat from here!"

Edu didn't even laugh at the chuckle.

"I'm seeing that our little holidays are being good for you." Edu snorted. "You are doing bad jokes again."

"Just relax and enjoy the travel." Dario answered. He was starting to wonder if this had been a good idea. Another thing that he couldn't find in the simulator was the atmospheric flight. He had done that before in small orbital jumpers, but a starfighter was *slightly* different.

"Well, I think I can disconnect this now." He said, and turned the repulsors off. The ship started to fall like a stone over the giant trees.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh..."

smashed against the canopy. Dario pushed the throttle at maximum, and the Y-Wing roared while it was launched to the sky."



"I'll do it better the next time, I promise." Dario said. He felt his heartbeats like his heart was about to abandon his body.

"Next time? Next time I'll pilot!" Edu said while putting his seat belt even more tense, and remembering that he had just done that. "I don't know what you have been doing in that simulator!"

"Don't worry. From here everything will be under control." Dario replied with a confidence he was starting to lose.

But it was true. When the Y-Wing found itself flying towards the stars, it seemed like as if it had its own life, and reacted to Dario's orders with precision. The gravity compensators worked as a charm, avoiding them the worst of the acceleration effects. Within minutes, the blue around the ship was being replaced by the black, and the vision of the stars helped the two men to breath a little easier.

Suddenly, two red dots appeared in the left display, and then one more. Dario used the computer to identify the ships, and he discovered two armored transports and a Star Destroyer.

"Edu, I don't think we're alone."

[Imperial Transport patrolling the Yavin system]

"Transport Gamma 1 to *Gray Wolf*. We have a Rebel fighter leaving the planet surface."

"Roger, Gamma 1, we have it on our screens too."

"What is going on?" Commander Guindamonn asked the nearest controller.

"We have detected a Rebel Y-Wing approaching, sir."

"They were there?" Guindamonn questioned with a fierce smile. He took the microphone from the controller's console and gave his orders directly. "This is Commander Guindamonn. All TIE Fighters abandon the patrolling and engage the Rebels!"

"At once, sir!" Identical answers were arriving from all the patrol leaders.

[Inside Moose's cockpit]

Moose looked at his screen with amazement. The TIE fighters were leaving at last! *The rest of the squadron must be arriving. Time to recover some heat!* he thought to himself.

He tried to say that with his own voice, but he couldn't. A painful groan was the only that came out from his throat. Stretching his frozen fingers, he connected all the systems again. He pushed the throttle forward and the B-Wing started to follow the TIE Fighters. The B-Wing's sensors didn't detect the Imperial fighters for almost an entire minute, because the mass of Yavin was between them and Moose's ship, but he was happy to have that time before entering combat. With the heatings at maximum, he was recovering slowly the mobility in his hands and feet, though he still felt himself moving slowly.

After all those hours of cold and waiting, he was eager to join the fight, but he didn't expect what he saw. When his fighter climbed over Yavin's horizon the sensors detected the three TIE Fighters again, and immediately after more signals appeared on his left display. The onboard computer identified a considerable amount of TIE Fighters, the Victory II Class Star Destroyer that Captain Orris had said they could find, two transports whose signals disappeared when they entered in the Yavin IV atmosphere... and a lonely Y-Wing flying directly towards the Star Destroyer.

"But who is that crazy guy?" Moose asked himself out loud. His voice was back, although it sounded as he had been in a wild party for a whole week. "Oh, my... Where is the squadron? What do I do now?"

[Inside the cockpit of the unknown Y-Wing.]

"There are ships everywhere!" Dario exclaimed. He realized in astonishment that he had actually heard the sound of the TIE Fighters' engines when they made their pass on them. He didn't understand for a second how he was able to hear anything through vacuum, and then he remembered what he had read about military ships. For many species, not only humanoids, hearing was one of the most important senses. Their bodies' natural reflexes reacted to sound even faster than to images, specially if there was any indication of danger in it, and that had not passed unnoticed to the modern ships designers. The onboard computer interpreted all the movement and energy readings that the ship's sensors caught around it, and translated into the appropriate sounds that were sent directly to the pilots' headphones. That allowed them to act by instinct in combat situations, as they had done in their natural environment millions of years before the evolution led them to such an strange place as the vacuum of space.

"Maybe they are coming to rescue us..." Edu said doubtfully, his voice dominating the rest of the sounds on Dario's headphones. He didn't seem as surprised to hear them, but he was more up to day with that kind of developments.

The three closest TIE fighters started to shoot against them. Five laser bolts made the forward shields almost collapse before Dario reacted and evaded the fire. He was doubly glad to have thought about installing their speakers on the fighter's intercom. Without hearing the sound he interpreted as laser bolts, he'd never had avoided them in time.

"Those are Imperial fighters, Edu!" Dario yelled. "And we are flying a Rebel ship! Do you remember that?"

Two more impacts in the rear shields interrupted Edu. Dario began to use what he had learned in the simulator, and maneuvered to avoid the TIEs while recharging the shields with energy from the weapons. When one of the TIEs crossed in front of them, he tried to shoot it down without success.

"Are you mad?" Edu exclaimed. "If you shoot at them they are going to kill us!"

"They are going to kill us anyway, so do something useful and use the ion cannons!"

"The ion cannon? Oh, gods!"

In the older model of the Y-Wing, the weapons operator managed the ion cannons, mounted over the rear part of the canopy. The cannon was not fixed, unlike the last models, having a great mobility. The gunner had a display available that showed the image captured by a micro-camera installed in the same cannon, and the targeting system added all the needed indicators. Edu had not revised the weapons, because even in the case that he knew how to, he didn't think they would need it. But if the laser cannons worked...

Edu centered his display on one of the TIEs that was on their tail and shot repeatedly against it. The Imperial pilot didn't expect that the Y-Wing could shoot towards the back, so he reacted too late. The fighter was covered with blue discharges and lost his route. A second later it exploded.

"I've hit one! I've hit one!" When Edu realized he was shouting, he understood the time for excuses and lies had finished. Dario was right about the futility of using the intercom. The Imperials were out there, blood thirsty, and the only way to escape from them, if any, was shooting at them. The fear didn't disappear, but it became a bit more tolerable. He realized how much frustration he had been accumulating inside during the last months: Shooting at the Imperial made him feel good. In the pilot's seat, Dario let something that sounded like a terrified war shout come through. Edu wiped the swear

Moose saw how the Y-Wing shot down the TIE fighter, and he was almost as surprised as the Imperial pilot. But the Y-Wing pilot wouldn't live that long if nobody helped him. Moose had the three TIEs he was chasing at range. He had needed to sacrifice a considerable part of the shields energy to obtain more speed and be able to keep them in range, but now his sight turned to green and he shot with his cannons linked. The TIEs had just detected him, and two of them started to evade, one to the left and one to the right, but the pilot in the center tried a loop, and Moose was far enough to keep him in his sight just with a slight pull of the stick. The TIE exploded.

"Only twenty or thirty remains!" Moose said as he added an evil chuckle.

[Onboard the Star Destroyer *Gray Wolf*]

"Sir, a B-Wing has appeared from somewhere and has joined the Y-Wing!"

"There are only two fighters, after all! What are those TIE pilot's doing?" Guindamonn questioned angrily. He looked at the tactical screen with concern. That didn't make any sense. First, they were attacked but a lonely Y-Wing. Then the Rebel reinforcements arrive: a lonely B-Wing. They couldn't be such a fools to think they could threaten a Star Destroyer and its fighter complement with only two fighters, and they couldn't be that desperate either. If they were projecting to use Yavin IV's base again, they would have planned a better defense, but on the other hand, perhaps this was just a trick to hide their real strength, and they have acted only when they have seen terrain troops to come...

"Have our transports landed already?"

"Negative, sir." The controller answered without moving his eyes from his console. "They are finishing the approaching maneuver. They have reported they have found an adequate place to deploy the AT-AT, three kilometers from the base. The other option was to land directly over them, and Captain Wertens has considered that would be too dangerous."

"All right, but have they spotted something of interest when they have flown over the Rebel installations?"

"Nothing, sir. The pilots of the transports have reported that there was no sign of activity, but the jungle is too dense around the base as to be certain." Guindamonn's frown accentuated.

"Tell Captain Wertens I want to be informed at the second of *everything* they find out down there."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like this." Guindamonn muttered.

[Yavin system's space]

Joker looked at the chronometer. Ten seconds to exit from hyperspace. During the jump the communications were broken, and the only thing you could do was wait and hope the computer did its job finely. She breathed deeply and saw how the stars became points of light again. On starboard Yavin filled the space. They have jumped as close to it as it was safe, although Torpedo's estimation of "safe distance" could be easily discussed. In front of them, the more famous of its moons was clearly visible, directly under the light of Yavin's star. Between Yavin IV and them the ominous wedge shape of a Star Destroyer attracted all her attention. *Here we go!*

"Everybody, report in." Shok'wave demanded.

One by one, all the pilots confirmed their ships were ready and in position.

"Lock S-foils in attack position."

The six B-Wings spread their lateral wings simultaneously and armed their cannons. The deadly bombers were ready for combat.

"Hey, the party has started without us!" Psycho exclaimed. They saw the fireworks before their computers informed about what caused them. Two Rebel fighters, a B-Wing and an Y-Wing were surrounded by what seemed a full squadron of TIE Fighters, and laser fire illuminated the space around them.



"It's Moose, that B-Wing is Moose's!" The voice of Foxfire was full of excitement and joy. She felt as

his heart weighted a ton less or so.

"He *is* alive!" Joker gasped.

"But who is in the Y-Wing?" Torpedo asked. "My computer identifies him as Gold 7..."

"Gold Squadron no longer has any Y-Wings after the battle of Yavin." Granite pointed out. "Besides, that is the older model, adapted for two crewmen..."

"Isn't this a curious coincidence?" Vyper questioned. His tone indicated he didn't believe it a coincidence at all, although he was far from have an explanation.

"Leave the questions for later and attack the objectives!" Shok'wave ordered. She understood what their minds were going through since she was asking herself the same things. However, she couldn't allow them to be focusing on the wrong subjects and jeopardize the entire mission.

The A-Wing group turned to port following Foxfire's fighter, at maximum speed, and maneuvered to starboard again when the left side of the *Gray Wolf* was more exposed in front of them. The slower B-Wings kept the route that was driving them to the rear part of the ship. Daolaris started to descend with relation to the main group, waiting to have the antenna that was near to the main bay at sight, while Zeppelin elevated his fighter to have a better position to attack the one that was in the bridge's structure, not far from the now visible shield generator's domes.

"Escort Team, have your target selection linked to that of your wingman, and introduce a delay of two hundred milliseconds in your computer." Foxfire ordered. Three of the six pilots acknowledged the order. Now every two paired fighters would shoot against the same targets.

"Escort Team, shoot your missiles... NOW!"

The six A-Wing's sent duo after duo of missiles against the Star Destroyer's weapons. Thirty six concussion missiles were flying towards the forward part of the Star Destroyer, where the warhead launchers were deployed, and the remaining twelve missiles searched the laser towers over the bridge's structure, the ones more dangerous for the approaching B-Wings.

"Engage the fighters now!" Foxfire ordered the A-Wing team.

"My pleasure!" Vyper replied.

Psycho counted eight TIE fighters in the first wave that was trying to intercept the B-Wings. They had supposed a great relief for Moose and the mysterious Y-Wing. Eight eyeballs was not a great challenge for the six A-Wing's, but they needed to be very fast if they wanted to make certain that none of the enemy fighters could disturb the B-Wings during their first pass. There will be more after that group, and then things would get more difficult.

Foxfire took a fast look towards the Star Destroyer while targeting the nearest TIE. She liked what she saw, the missiles had almost reached their targets, but she couldn't keep looking. Her sight was turning green.

"Move the ship, move the ship right now!" Guindamonn screamed as he watched on the screen at the signals indicating the concussion missiles that were getting closer and closer. If the Star Destroyer would have been moving, the Rebel pilots wouldn't have been able to hit the target with their missiles from such a far distance, but the giant ship started to move very slowly, too late to avoid the damage. Many of the missiles did fail the main target, but with the amount of warheads that were dispatched the launchers were doomed. The Imperial gunners tried to shoot them down, but the concussion missiles were far faster than the proton torpedoes and the majority of them had already reached the enemy ship. The two warhead launchers were destroyed, with at least three laser towers. By then, the B-Wings were almost in position to shoot without even being intercepted yet.

"Torpedo, you take the left tower, I'll take the right one!" Shok'wave exclaimed.

"Copy that." Torpedo maneuvered to evade the fire from the laser guns and watched as the dome

containing the powerful shield generator grew bigger in front of him as he got closer. He pushed the trigger and when the two torpedoes hit the upper part of the dome he was already turning to the left, leaving a clean fire line for Joker.

Shok'wave had shot two torpedoes too against the right tower and like the mirror reflection of Torpedo's fighter she turned to the right, leaving the field clear for Marauder. Zeppelin passed over them searching the hyperspatial antenna, but now every laser tower was shooting against the incoming fighters. Joker and Marauder found an impressive wall of fire between them and the now damaged shield towers. Joker was forced to break her attack with her shields hardly resisting the laser bolts, but Marauder decided to try it even with the opposition. His B-Wing exploded before he could shoot a single torpedo.

Dario and Edu couldn't believe what was happening. They were just in the middle of the battle, and they had seen how the missiles impacted against the Star Destroyer. The TIE pilots had more work in store for them now, and most of them ignored the crippled Y-Wing to engage the new threat. They saw that Moose's B-Wing had turned its direction to the Star Destroyer, shooting his torpedoes against the ship's bay.

"Best regards!" Moose said.

A new squadron of TIE Interceptors was being launched and they found Moose's torpedoes without a chance to evade. A huge explosion trapped at least eight Interceptors, hanged from the launching array that came from one of the hangars, in a hell of fire, chained explosions penetrating the magnetic field and causing damages on the hangar itself.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Moose cheered. He selected a broader range for his transmissions and spoke.

"The Y-Wing's guys, if you can hear me, move away from the Star Destroyer while you are able to!"

"Thanks for the help!" Dario maneuvered to accomplish with the advice that had just sounded through their headphones. "Did you see what that pilot has done up there, Edu?" He asked while diving back towards the moon.

"Yes, I did. I just can't believe any of this!" Edu replied, moving the ion cannons in a defensive arc towards their rear side. This was the first time they were no TIEs on their tail.

"We badly needed this breath..." Dario used those few moments of relief to recharge the shields all that he could and once the indicator showed a pale green again for the primaries he piloted the Y-Wing back after some of the TIE's that had left to engage the incoming B-Wing's. The A-Wing's were already there.

"Do you know what you are doing?" Edu asked.

"I think so..." Dario answered while targeting a TIE fighter.

Daolaris had the antenna in her sight. She was the only pilot who didn't have a callsign. To be called something different than the name received from the clan would have been unacceptable between the Twi'leks. She ignored the laser bolts that were pounding away at her shields. In the opposite side of the ship, Zeppelin was firing two torpedoes against the upper antenna. Without stopping to look, he followed his way towards the arrow head of the ship shooting with his laser over every target he could see, while maneuvering to the left and right to evade the fire. When he thought he was far enough, he made a half loop spinning at the same time, changing his direction in an elegant move for a B-Wing. But the antenna was not there, his torpedoes had already blown it away.

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

"Our shield generators have suffered damages, sir." Informed an officer. "They are still operative, but a few more torpedoes and we will be vulnerable!"

"Call for reinforcements!" Guindamonn demanded. He had hoped not to give that order, at least not so soon, but things were not developing as he had expected. "Contact the *Punisher* right now!"

Daolaris shot.

"Sir, we have just lost our hyperspatial comms! " the young officer reported.

"DESTROY THOSE B-WINGS RIGHT NOW!!!"

[Back in the battle]

The Imperials were recovering from the initial surprise. Although Moose's torpedoes had caused great casualties amongst the Imperial forces, only one of three hangars were affected, and more and more fighters were now joining the battle.

"Watch out, Foxfire!" Granite warned. "You've got two more after you!"

"Care yourself too!" Iceman exclaimed. "You have a bogie at *your* five!"

"Thanks Iceman, I didn't see that one!" Granite evaded the Interceptor before he could be hit by its lasers. He would have rather preferred to be piloting one of the B-Wings, and be causing *real* damage, but all those recon flights had made him assigned to the A-Wing group instead. *Another reason to learn to have my mouth closed...*

There were so many TIEs around that they couldn't avoid that many of them and they raced towards the B-Wings. Vyper knew very well that the TIE pilots had orders to ignore the A-Wings and attack the assault fighters instead. He had given orders like that some time ago.

"Psycho, Tempest," he shouted, "try to catch some of those TIEs that are going after the B-Wings!"

"I'm on my way!" Psycho replied. At least three TIE Fighters and two Interceptors ran to attempt to reach Psycho and Tempest. Vyper chose the Interceptors as the main threat for his comrades and targeted the closest one. His pilot never knew what hit him. The other one saw the danger in time, and when his fighter was about to explode he was able to eject. Vyper remembered how he was taught in the Imperial Academy how to ram the pilots who ejected in combat. He felt a bad taste in his mouth when such a memory crossed his mind. He closed his mind from that thought and turned to help Foxfire's group with the incoming fighters. Now Moose's B-Wing and that mysterious Y-Wing were joining with them.

Joker had seen in her display a cold message from the computer. White 12 had been destroyed. Marauder had been the last cadet abandoning the Training Wing to join the Squadron. She could remember him as he just earned his wings of Flight Officer and the band with his combat patches, the happiest man in the universe, saying to her that they will soon be flying together again, forgetting she had not always been a trainee. Moose always said "It's better to hit the target in the second pass than never hit it all!" Marauder had not learned that lesson. On the other hand, Moose himself was alive after all! Joker left those thoughts for later. She was now in position to try that second pass, and Shok'wave would soon have the right tower in in her sight again.

Shok'wave checked the closest pilots positions and the opposition the had around. She thought the situation was calling for a slight change of tactic.

"Torpedo, leave the left tower for Joker and do all you can with the bay." White Leader ordered. "If you can avoid that more fighters are released..." She didn't even finish her sentence, it wasn't necessary. There were already too many TIEs around them.

"All right, boss!" Torpedo replied while directing his B-Wing to the other side of the *Gray Wolf*. "It's all yours, Joker!"

"Copy that." This time she could evade the worst of the fire and shoot her torpedoes against the tower. One of them missed the target, but the other did the job. The dome erupted in flame and immediately the shield readings of the Star Destroyer descended to a half of their previous strength.

"Well done, Joker!" Shok'wave said. But now she was the one with problems. It seemed that all the remaining laser towers were shooting at her. She aborted her attack and retreated to a position where she could recharge her shields. But that was not easy. Five TIE fighters were approaching her from different sides, making it impossible to evade all of them at the same time.

"Could someone get those guys off my tail?" Shok'wave yelled into the comm.

"I'm on it boss!" Psycho appeared with his A-Wing spitting laser fire. One of the TIEs exploded and one more was forced to interrupt his attack. Shok'wave shot against a third TIE and damaged it. She breathed after several seconds of holding her breath.

The battle near the Star Destroyer's bay was getting more and more fierce. The *Gray Wolf* was now turning and spinning without warning, and it was more difficult to keep near the selected targets. The TIE Fighters and Interceptors seemed to be everywhere, and the Rebel pilots were being overcome by the force of numbers. Covered by Moose, Daolaris had already destroyed one of the catapults, so the Star Destroyer couldn't launch new TIEs as fast as it would like to.

"Moose, this is Torpedo. Do you need some help down there?"

"It would be most appreciated, but I think you are a bit late to prevent the bad guys from launching more TIEs at us. Most of their fighter complement has to be already flying, *in one or more pieces*."

"Too bad for us, but if we still manage to put that bay out of commission they wouldn't have a place to return to..."

"That would give them something to think about!" Daolaris pointed out while recovering a position besides Moose's starboard wing.

"That would be... wait a moment." Moose saw how two more Interceptors were about to be launched and directed his B-Wing towards them. He had no more torpedoes, but if he could cause some of those fighters to explode inside the bay... "Do you have any torpedo in your launchers, Daolaris?"

"No, I'm sorry, the two on the catapult were the last ones."

"I still have half of mines, I'll be there in some seconds if someone take this two eyeballs off of my tail!"

"We have our hands full of them!" Granite's reply came through.

"Sorry, Torpedo, you're definitely late, the opportunity is now!" Moose said.

"Be careful you two!" Torpedo warned when he saw the two B-Wings flying directly towards the bay's entrance. The laser batteries installed on the Star Destroyer's keel concentrated their fire over them. Daolaris received a direct hit from one of them. With her shields collapsed she had to break or be destroyed by the next blast.

"I can't follow you!"

Moose had no time to answer. The two Interceptors were launched just towards him. He shot against one of them by pure instinct, and tried desperately to get out of the trajectory of the other one.

"Oooooops...!" The Interceptor collided violently against the rear side of the B-Wing, in front of the horrified eyes of Torpedo and Daolaris.

When the cloud of fire disappeared, they could see that Moose was still there. But his B-Wing was evidently badly damaged.

"I've lost my engines, I've lost my engines!" Moose screamed. He was no more than a few hundred meters from the bay. His desperate situation was seen with interest on the monitors of the *Gray Wolf's* bridge.

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

"Sir, we have almost lost our shield generators. The remaining tower can't cover the entire ship." Captain Zelia warned.

"How serious it is?"

"As I've said, the shield generator is under a big stress, trying to make all the work that usually is done by two of them. The readings about the dome show that its armor presents fails of integrity in several points. A new impact on it and we can lose it."

"Forget that now." Guindamonn said, looking at the images sent by one of the bay's cameras. "I want that pilot captured!" he ordered.

"At once, sir."

"If there is something to know about what is happening in Yavin IV that pilot will tell us!" *Oh, yes, of course he will do _just_ fine!*

[Space close to Gray Wolf's main bay]

"Moose, don't eject, I repeat, don't eject!" Vyper screamed when he saw where the B-Wing was. "You are too close to the Star Destroyer!" If Moose used the ejection system from that position, he would collide against the Star Destroyer's hull.

"More problems incoming," Daolaris said. "Look at that shuttle!"

A shuttle had exited from the bay and was directing its path towards the crippled B-Wing. His intentions were painfully clear. More and more TIEs were joining there as well.

"Moose has serious difficulties, we need some help immediately!" Vyper yelled as he tried to destroy some of the TIE Fighters that were around Moose's ship.

"All fighters, get to the bay!" Foxfire ordered. *I can't understand how he always manage to get in trouble!* "We must do all we can to save Moose!"

"I'm on my way!" Zeppelin replied, who had caused a great headache to the Imperial gunners that had been trying to stop him from launching his torpedoes against their laser turrets.

This is not my day! Moose thought. He was unable to move or rotate his ship, but he could shoot while there was remaining energy, so every time an enemy fighter crossed in front of him he saluted him in his own way. But if that shuttle behind him reached him before the others could get there to help, it would be all over for him. Moose knew that it wouldn't take that many ion shots to complete their task.

A desperate idea came to Torpedo.

"Zeppelin, we are going to push Moose's fighter!" Torpedo exclaimed through the intercom. "Everybody, cover us!"

"You heard that," Foxfire said. "let's clean this zone of TIEs!"

An impressive cross of laser bolts were taking place in a very reduced amount of space. The Imperial fighters were trying to avoid that none of the Rebels could approximate neither to Moose's B-Wing nor to the shuttle that was now using its ion cannons to disable him. Nobody could do anything. In a matter of seconds Moose would be a prisoner.

Relatively far from there, Shok'wave and Joker, with Psycho and Tempest as escorts, were the only pilots who were attacking the Star Destroyer now. The two women were the last ones who had torpedoes left in store.

"Tempest, cover me!" Shok'wave ordered. "I'm going to destroy that damned tower this time. Joker, take a position from where you can launch all your remaining torpedoes against the engines! Psycho, cover her!"

Every pilot obeyed without reply. Shok'wave directed her fighter one more time towards the right shield generator tower. At least six fighters were trying to shoot her down, and all the lasers towers of that part of the Star Destroyer were pointing at her too. She redirected all her shield energy to forward settings, hoping that Tempest was able to protect her back. While Joker was moving away from the Star Destroyer, she was getting closer every second. She couldn't evade all of the laser bolts from the Imperial ship, but her shields were resisting and Tempest had put his A-Wing on her tail, with all the energy from the cannons transferred to the rear shields, receiving most of the shots from the TIEs that were trying to kill Shok'wave.

"Shoot now, Shok'wave!" the desperate pilot cried. His shields were about to collapse, but he didn't abandon his position covering his flight leader.

"There it goes!" Shok'wave said while launching her last torpedo against the tower. She maneuvered to avoid the collision, and her fighter was shaken by the expansive wave from two explosions. The tower and Tempest's fighter.

Poor courageous guy! Shok'wave thought. Thank you, Tempest. I'll never forget you!

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

The burst of the shield tower was clearly felt in the Star Destroyer's bridge. A frightened officer called Commander Guindamonn.

"Sir, we have lost our shields!" Captain Zelia looked at his higher officer waiting for his reaction. He was glad not to be in his position in that moment, but on the other hand, had been he in command, this situation would have never happened. *He should have reported about what we had discovered and his theory, in the first place, or at least informed about where we were going, but no...* Guindamonn turned to look at him.

"Sir?"

"Captain, order our TIE fighters to come back to the *Gray Wolf* just after the shuttle reports that they have taken that pilot as prisoner." He ordered. "And tell the Navigation officer to make the calculations to jump towards the *Punisher's* position."

"At once, sir." *I hope that what that pilot has to say is worth the effort, or someone is going to be in serious trouble.*

[Space close to Gray Wolf's main bay]

Amongst the confusion of those moments, a battered fighter was racing towards the Imperial shuttle.

His pilot was trying to control the trembling of his legs.

"Target that shuttle Edu!" Dario said. "We are going to save that pilot!"

"Or die in the attempt..." Edu whispered, but he made the cannon turn, forgot the TIEs and targeted the Imperial shuttle.

"NOW, NOW, NOW!" Dario shouted with all his strength.

The combined fire from the laser and the ion cannons consumed all the weapons energy in just seconds, but when Dario maneuvered to pass under the shuttle, her thrusters were died. The two friends had managed to disable it. None of them saw the TIE Interceptor that had been about to shoot them down, but Iceman did. The Imperial fighter crashed against the Star Destroyer spinning without control.

"Those guys got it!" Granite exclaimed. "Don't give up now!"

Zeppelin had put his fighter touching what remained of the main wing of Moose's ship. Torpedo had done the same over the thick part that joined the cockpit with the engines section. The three fighters were stopped in space. The rest of the pilots were trying to keep the Imperial fighters busy.

"We need to do this at the same time, Zeppelin." Torpedo said. "Push your throttle at my signals!"

"Ok, let's go!"



"Don't let any of those fighters shoot at them!" Foxfire cried. She was not going to allow the Imperials to harm Moose while she had something to fight with. Her A-Wing had suffered serious damage, and her control panel was a mess of junk and smoke. The computer was inoperative and she was fighting with her eyes as the only sensor device. She didn't need more. A TIE fighter that had shot a laser bolt over Zeppelin's fighter couldn't shoot any more.

"Throttle at ten percent, NOW!" Torpedo said. The three B-Wings started to move like they were one ship.

Moose heard a bump when his two partners started to push his fighter. There was something worse than the cold he had felt on the cockpit until some minutes ago, and was starting to feel again, with all

his systems disabled. It was to see the battle raging around him and not being able to do anything but watch. With the onboard computer out of line, he couldn't hear anything from outside the B-Wing. Only his own breath and the creaking of the hull broke the frightening silence. The laser bolts lightened the space in a noiseless tempest, one loaded with lightnings but with no thunders. A TIE fighter was hit and exploded almost in front of him, creating a burning flower of fire that disappeared an instant later, leaving no trace of the machine and the man consumed between its deadly petals, but Moose couldn't hear it. Somehow that made it seem less real, his eyes telling something to his mind, but his ears denying it. He cursed noisily only to hear his own voice. The absence of sounds was getting to his nerves as he could have never imagined. "If you bring me out of this one..." Moose said although nobody could hear him, "I'll buy you all that you two can drink!"

"Twenty percent, NOW!"

Daolaris finished off another TIE.

"Thirty percent, NOW!"

Vyper hit an Interceptor, and the damaged fighter entered in the sight of Granite for just one second. It was enough.

"Forty percent, NOW!"

The three B-Wings were moving away from the Star Destroyer as they increased speed. They couldn't turn, but all they needed was to put the most possible distance between them and the Capital ship.

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

Commander Guindamonn saw how the damaged B-Wing was pushed out of the camera range. The disabled shuttle covered the center of the image, spinning slowly around its main axis and moving away from the camera impulsed by the inertia. He cursed in silence while receiving new reports from nervous officers. Their three TIE squadrons had received important losses for only three Rebels fighters destroyed or disabled, although all the remaining ones had suffered an important punishment. The wing leaders reported that all the enemy ships would be destroyed or forced to withdraw would wipe them if they were given more time to finish their job, but having lost the protection of their shields, Guindamonn couldn't risk the *Gray Wolf* to be seriously damaged. He might have lost his great opportunity, but he would not ruin his whole career staying and losing his ship. If he was able to receive some help, he might even save the day and turn the disaster into a victory.

"Let's get out of here." Guindamonn said.

"But most of our fighters are still out there!" Captain Zelia objected.

"Our pilots will be able to care of themselves. We'll return later with reinforcements, Captain. Obey my orders!"

Captain Zelia looked at his higher official with scorn, but he didn't say a word. Not even to point out that their terrain troops were being abandoned on the planet, too. He would reserve it for his report.

The *Gray Wolf* was performing a wide turn on its powerful maneuver thrusters. The stern kept pointing towards Yavin, while its bow headed towards the outer space, avoiding carefully one of the uninhabitable moons, too small as to cause a significant gravity effect. The shields of the Star Destroyer had just fallen, but a different reading, the one indicating the activity from the Imperial vessel's main reactors, was increasing quickly in Shok'wave's screen. She introduced the new course on her onboard computer and the answer confirmed what her experience had suggested first: the *Gray Wolf* was heading towards a valid exit point from the system, and judging by the energy readings, it would be ready to make the jump before a minute.

"Assault group, they have lost the shields and are powering up their engines." Shok'wave said. She knew that Zeppelin and Torpedo were trying to take Moose away from the danger zone, but this was the crucial moment. She need all the available B-Wings to try to disable the Star Destroyer before it could escape. A hard order to give. "Change to ion cannons and attack the objective. All other considerations are secondary!"

"Roger, Leader." Torpedo's voice came through. "We are attacking the Destroyer now, with the help of our friends on the Y-Wing. White Six is safe, repeat, Moose is safe. "

"Copy that, Torpedo, *glad*
the Force!" Joker, are you with me?"

Thanks to

"As soon as I can get free of my excess of weight, Leader." The two TIEs that had been chasing her were being kept away by Psycho, what gave her the breath she needed to obtain a lock on a worth target and launch her remaining warheads. "Two... and two more. Four torpedoes on their way! Changing to ion cannons." Scarce seconds later, the blue streaks of the proton torpedoes reached the rear side of the *Gray Wolf*. They hit the ship with a big detonation. One of the three main engines, the central one, ceased working, black smoke the only thing coming out from the twisted thruster.

"Nice shot, Joker! Now let's see if we can made her definitely stop." She took a look with concern at the readings of the Star Destroyer status. Its rear batteries were shooting unceasingly, preventing the Rebel pilots from shoot accurately at the most vulnerable spots. Their ion blasts had started to cause fails on the Imperial ship's systems, but not fast enough.

The *Gray Wolf* was increasing its speed, and soon it would be far from the reach of the Rebels.

"Oh, those cowards!" Granite's voice sounded through the intercom. "We are losing them!"

"Yes, we are, *damn it*." Shok'wave cursed. She saw the Star Destroyer move away with frustration.

Suddenly, just in front of the Star Destroyer a new capital ship exited from hyperspace. It was a Nebulon B Frigate, and it was almost exactly in the point where the *Gray Wolf* would jump to hyperspace.

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

"ABORT, ABORT!!!!" Guindamonn cried desperately. "How did the *Punisher* find us?"

Dozens of proton torpedoes were being launched by the Frigate. Alarms sounded into the *Gray Wolf's* bridge. Those warheads had been launched *at them*.

"That is *not* the *Punisher*." Captain Zelia said coldly.

[Back in the battle]

Orris, the twisted an sly old Orris
of the squadron saturated the intercom. *In moments like this I almost like you!*

The *Gray Wolf* was turning to avoid the collision against the Frigate, and that combined with the high speed that it had in that moment caused many of the torpedoes to fail its target, but the rest impacted against the now unprotected hull, and big sections of the ship erupted in flames that disappeared in the void of space. Full areas got exposed to vacuum and the fatal decompression killed all those unfortunate crewmen who were inside. The Star Destroyer was deadly injured. It was only moving by inertia, and the *force* of the explosions made it start to turn and spin.

"Fire with all the ion cannons!" Captain Orris ordered on the *Joan d'Arc's* bridge. Lines of blue filled the space between the two ships. In a matter of seconds the Star Destroyer was disabled, most of its electronics saturated and burned, unable to shoot or even change its erratic movements. The *Joan d'Arc's* tractor beams managed to stop it from moving completely.

"Cease fire!" Orris ordered. "Shoot only against any Imperial fighters who try to continue fighting."

[Gray Wolf's bridge]

The lights on board the *Gray Wolf* blinked and then died. The emergency energy generators managed to turn on some of them again after some seconds, but most of the systems had stopped working. In the bridge, all the crewmen who weren't wounded were standing up, looking around and seeing the disaster. The entire room was filled with smoke and none of the devices and consoles had even a minimum sign of life.

"What is going on?" Guindamonn asked completely confused, his eyes widely opened, trying to contain the blood from an injury on his forehead with his hand.

"We have been disabled." Zelia replied calmly. "And soon we'll be boarded."

"What are you saying? Boarded?" Guindamonn couldn't understand anything, not even the blaster that was pointing at his chest. "What are you doing, Captain Zelia?"

"Taking satisfaction!" His eyes didn't show any emotion when he shot his weapon, the energy settings adjusted to kill. Guindamonn collapsed on the deck with a steaming hole where his heart had been, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. None of the officials who had seen the scene said a word.

[Space around Yavin IV]

The battle didn't proceed longer than a minute. The Imperial fighters that had been trying to reach the *Gray Wolf* were now trapped between the fire from the *Joan d'Arc* and White Squadron. Zeppelin and Torpedo didn't participate in those last moments of combat. They returned beside Moose, preventing that any of the Imperials could decide to take his revenge on his defenseless squad mate. Some TIEs tried to run away, but most of the Imperial pilots understood immediately that they had lost. With their mothership disabled and without possibility to make hyperspace jumps, their only chance of survival was surrender.

This is over. Joker thought. And I'm still here. She let out a very big sigh.

"Open a protected line with General Madine." Captain Orris said to the Communications officer. "We do not have enough troops to take something so huge like a Star Destroyer." He pushed the button that opened the comms with the boarding teams. "Captain Tederis, this is Captain Orris."

"Yes, sir." Came the answer from the intercom.

"Go out there with our armored transports and make prisoners of all those fighter pilots."

"At once, sir!"

Orris pushed a different button.

"All gunners, keep your cannons trained at the Star Destroyer. If any more Imperial capital ships appear before we have received reinforcements, destroy it without waiting for my orders." Affirmative answers came from the gunner officers.

One by one, the Imperial pilots made their fighters stop near the quiet Star Destroyer. The Rebel

fighters started to fly in circles around the Imperial ships, waiting for the boarding transports.

Orris looked over the shoulders of the man who was using the ship's sensors to see how many fighters from White Squadron were still there and identified them. The man noted the presence of his Commander.

"They have lost three fighters, sir, although it seems that one of the pilots is still alive." he said without even moving his eyes from the screen. "There is an Alliance Y-Wing with them. Its transponder identifies it as Gold Seven.

"Gold Seven? An Y-Wing? Well, thank you, Lieutenant." Captain Orris said. He would find out later where that Y-Wing had come from. White's casualties, although somewhat expected, were bad news. He made a mental note to present his condolences to Commander Krenzel as soon as she returned.

"White Leader to the *Joan d'Arc*
His fighter has been disabled."

"Roger, White Leader." Came the answer. "Shuttle Anubis is parting right now.

"Thank you, *Joan d'Arc*. Torpedo, Zeppelin, stay there until that shuttle arrives and then provide escort to the *Joan d'Arc*."

"Roger, Shok'wave. We'll take care of this lucky guy." Torpedo replied.

The Y-Wing occupied by Dario and Edu was flying near the A-Wings that were watching the Imperial fighters and the transports docking with them. The two friends looked at both sides. They were flanked by an A-Wing and a B-Wing.

"Y-Wing's pilot, this is White Leader." The female voice they had been hearing all the time giving the orders said. "Can you hear me?"

"Come on, Dario, reply!" Edu said.

"Sí, nosotros..."

"In Basic, not in Iberyan, you dumb!"

"Oh... Yes, White Leader, we've been hearing you the whole time." Dario said at last. "Eeeer... Nice to meet you?"

"Would you mind telling us who you are and where you are coming from? Because I don't believe for an instant that you're part of Gold squadron." Shok'wave asked.

"Gold squadron? Ah, no, we aren't. You see, it's a long story..."

"Well, you are going to tell it more than one time when we arrive on the *Joan d'Arc*. Follow us now please." Vyper interrupted from the other side.

"Ok, we are going. Perhaps someone will have to push us inside, because we have burned out almost all the fuel we had."

"That won't be a problem. I'll do that myself. Ah, one more thing." Shok'wave said. "Thank you very much for your help."

"You are welcome!" Dario exclaimed with joy and relief.

Two kilometers away, Foxfire had taken Zeppelin's place beside Moose's ship. She passed slowly close to the B-Wing's cockpit. She saw Moose waving his hand, and her heart started to calm down at last. He was going to hear her when they were back on the *Joan*, but now she was too glad as to think what she was going to tell him. Then she noticed that Moose was trying to tell her something with gestures. He was holding himself with his arms insistently.

"This is White Two to rescue shuttle *Anubis*." Foxfire said. Moose's message was not hard to understand. "Barris, you better hurry or you will recover only a frozen pilot!"

"This is *Anubis*." The known voice of the shuttle's pilot said. "We'll take just forty seconds to made it there."

With his fighter disabled, Moose had lost the heat in his fighter again. The entire battle had not lasted more than fifteen minutes, and the cockpit's temperature was descending one more time. "It's hot, very very hot!" Moose whispered between his chattering teeth. "Very very very hot... Damn, suggestion doesn't work!"

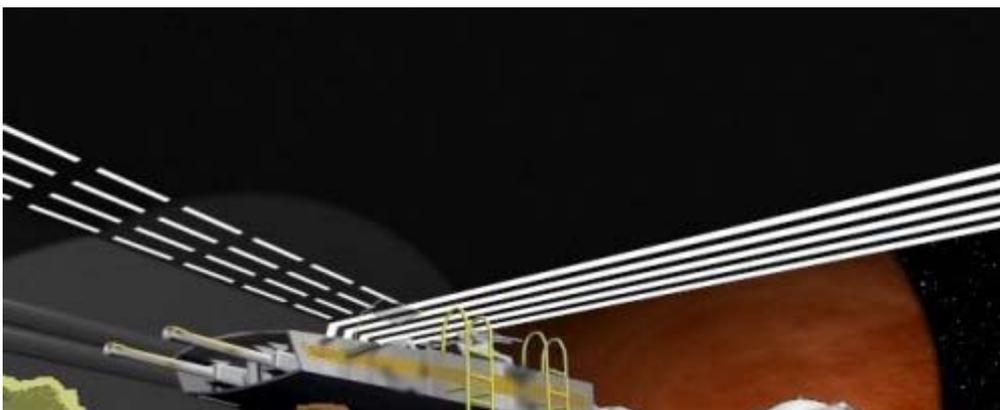
Half an hour later, the Calamari Cruiser *Star of Dawn* dropped from hyperspace, with the company of two big troop carriers and immediately started to launch its X-Wing fighters complement. The tired White Squadron's pilots who were still escorting the *Joan d'Arc* and the *Gray Wolf* were relieved at last. Several transports docked with the Imperial ship, capturing its crew almost without resistance, while the carriers descended to Yavin IV. Equipped with heavy weapons, the Alliance troops would be able to force the Imperial platoon sent to the moon to give up.

The *Joan d'Arc's* transports transferred the Imperial pilots to the *Star of Dawn*. Everyone of those men and women would be interrogated first on board the Rebel cruiser by some of the Fleet officers, and then many of them would be delivered to the Intelligence Services' facilities, where General Crix Madine's agents would interrogate them a lot harder and in more detail. From there, there was more than a possible destiny. It was a known fact that the Empire used to recruit a considerable part of his crews by force, so probably some of those prisoners recovered their freedom after some time. And amongst them, a few could even join the Rebel cause in the future. The Alliance was able to forgive, as Michael "Vyper" Stauber, now White Squadron's Intelligence officer, but ancient member of the Imperial elite squadron "Black Knights", knew very well.

[Onboard the *Joan d'Arc*]

The first ship to land had been the shuttle *Anubis*, closely followed by Foxfire, Torpedo and Zeppelin's fighters. Captain Lewis "Moose" Gregory had been immediately sent to the medical facilities. He didn't show any grave symptom of congelation on his hands or feet, but it was better to be sure. Foxfire left him in a bacta tank, where he would be for the next three hours, and returned to the main bay with a smile. The bacta tank was a torture good enough to punish Moose for having frightened her.

When she arrived to the bay, everybody was watching the crippled Y-Wing that had just been softly parked by the tractor beam. *Nice to have a tractor beam now*. Dario thought with a faint smile. He opened the canopy and the two men used the stairs that the bay's personnel had adjusted to the fighter. Edu whistled when he noticed the Y-Wing's shape. New scorches decorated its hull at several places, and there were even some deep scratches, the still hot metal twisted and melted on the edges. The two Iberyans stood besides the ship uneasily. With their tourist clothes, they couldn't seem more out of place amongst the military uniforms and flight suits.





"Hi, there!" Dario said. Edu waved his hand timidly.

Two women in orange flight suits were approaching them.

"Nice to meet you, gentlemen." One of the ladies began, "I'm Commander Sherry Krenzel, White Leader, and this is my Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Avery Schroeder.

"Nice to meet you too." Replied the two men at the same time, while shaking their hands.

"My name is Dario Pozo, and this is my friend Eduardo Yanes." Dario said. "We are from the planet Iberyia and..."

"Wait a minute." Shok'wave interrupted. "We are not the only ones who wants to hear your story. So, please come with us for now."

Foxfire was looking at the way they were dressed.

"And what exactly would you have done if you had been forced to eject?" Foxfire asked. Dario and Edu opened their eyes widely, looked at what Foxfire was looking at, looked at each other, and finally looked back at Foxfire again.

"Well, that's a legit question indeed." Edu replied at last.

Foxfire smiled first. Then Shok'wave began to smile as well. Then Foxfire's smile became a grin. Shok'wave grinned too. And then the two women began to laugh, the people who were surrounding them did the same, Dario and Edu were the next, and soon, everybody, even those who had not heard the chat were all laughing out of control.

"If the rest of your story is like that," Foxfire said wiping the tears from her face, "I don't want to miss a single word."

With that statement the laughter started again.

Not all of the story was so funny. Captain Orris, Shok'wave and the rest of her staff, with the exception of Moose, still in the bacta tank, listened as they told the story beginning with the events in Lorance City ten months ago, to the beginning of the battle, when the absent pilot had saved them in the first place. Captain Orris interrupted them a moment to talk with the commandos sent to Yavin IV by the *Star of Dawn*. Shok'wave wrote something in her datapad, and showed it to the Captain. "Tell them that they should try to find this too!" she whispered. When Edu and Dario ended their story, there was a brief moment of silence, broken at last by Captain Orris.

"Well, gentlemen. I think this has been a hard day for you both. I've asked the troops that are now in Yavin IV to try and recover your ship," Edu's relief at that was more than evident. "and it will be repaired by our technicians immediately upon arrival at the *Joan d'Arc*."

"You don't know how much we thank you for that, sir." Edu said.

"It will be nothing at all, it's the least we can do for you." Orris said. "When that job is done, you two can leave at your discretion. But now, Lieutenant Harris will show you where you can rest while you

will be our guest."

"Thank you again, sir!" the two friends said.

"Are you aware that between the two of you have scored four enemy fighters, besides disabling the shuttle?" Shok'wave asked, with a curious expression on her face.

"Only four? I thought it was a dozen!" Edu replied, making the presents break into laughter.

"Well, it was, how do you call it?" Dario continued. "Hmmm, yes, a rich target environment." That caused new laughs, and an even more intent look in Shok'wave.

While that was happening on the *Joan d'Arc*, all the Imperial personnel were made prisoners, and the fighters, shuttles and transports that were in conditions to fly were captured as well. General Madine could surely find many uses for them. Too bad that all the AT-ATs that were in Yavin IV were destroyed in the fight against the Rebel troops before the Imperial soldiers decided to give up.

Finally, two hours after the arrival of the *Star of Dawn*, nothing interesting remained on the *Gray Wolf*, and the ship itself was damaged beyond any chance of repair. Looking through the main window on the *Star of Dawn's* bridge, her captain, a Calamarian General called Berin, opened the line with the *Joan d'Arc*.

"Captain Orris, it's your capture."

"With your permission." The Captain said with a nod towards White Leader, present on the bridge besides him. "It's your and your pilots' work as much as mine and my crew."

"Only as much, *sir*?" Shok'wave said arching an eyebrow. "You can have the final shot, although we both know very well who made *most* of the work."

Orris looked at her puzzled for a second, and then remembered that General Benin was waiting for an answer. "Thank you, sir. All batteries, fire!"

The *Joan d'Arc* shot laser after laser bolt against the tortured hull from a secure distance. The *Gray Wolf* exploded at last, although the *Joan d'Arc* turbolasers kept firing at the bigger rests for half a minute. The *Star of Dawn's* tractor beams took care that what remained of the Victory II Class Star Destroyer was pushed in the adequate direction. In some hours, all that would fall under the gravitational field of the biggest planet of the Yavin system, the gassy red giant that gave it its name. Those pieces that did not disappear under its thick atmosphere, would merge with the great amount of spatial debris already orbiting the planet, the remainings of what had once been the Emperor's *Death Star*, and the ships of all those pilots who died in the battle that ended with its destruction, were they Rebels or Imperials.

"Excellent work, Captain Orris." General Benin said. "My congratulations to White Squadron, too."

"Thank you again, sir." He answered looking at Shok'wave.

"Now seriously, thank you for coming in our help, Captain." She said sincerely.

"My intention was not to help you, but have the mission accomplished." He said coldly. "But you are welcome anyway." With that he gave the conversation as finished.

This man has not a bit of sense of humor! White Leader thought while leaving the bridge.

The *Star of Dawn* *Joan d'Arc* some minutes later. The first question that had been asked to the captured Imperial high officers was if they were expecting reinforcements. Those who had cooperated during the capture gave a negative answer, but it was better not to take any risk giving their word too much credit. The Rebel ships would be safer in any other place.

[Three days later, Joan d'Arc's pilot's quarters]

An impatient Edu was closing a travel bag and exiting from the room they had been assigned on board the *Joan d'Arc*.

"Come on, Dario, hurry up, time to go home!" He stopped when he saw that his friend didn't move.

"I'm not going with you, my friend." Dario said seriously.

"What?"

"When the troops recovered the *Little Laura*, they were suggested to recover something more. My pilot file."

"Your pilot file?" Edu questioned without understanding what Dario was talking about.

"Yes, the file generated by the simulator with the results of my training sessions. Shok'wave took a look at my file and she has asked me if I wanted to join White Squadron. To join the Alliance." As his friend seemed unable to answer, he continued. "She said that I'm a born pilot." That made Edu let out a short laugh. "Yes, I suppose what you think about my piloting abilities. They had just lost two pilots in the fight, and she said that it would take less time to train me themselves and get over the bureaucratic stuff to have me on the squad without passing through the official test, than receiving new fresh pilots. She said also that you could have a place, if you wanted it, but I told her that you had a family to care of, back at Iberyia."

Edu stood in silence half a minute looking at his friend. He knew what Dario was feeling, his personal tragedy and his not very well hidden desire to join the Rebels that had been growing inside him from the day he had been trying in vain to enter into his city, to find his wife. Edu walked the steps that separated them, and they embraced each other. Neither of them said a word until Edu was in *Little Laura's* cockpit as Dario was holding the door open.

"We'll miss you." Edu said. "Nuria, Laura and I will miss you, my dear and hard-headed friend."

"I'll miss you too." Dario answered with a smile. "You can be sure of that. But I do need to stay here."

"I know."

"Then try to explain it to Nuria. Tell her how I thank all three of you for what you have done for me, please."

"I'll do that, don't you worry. And if the blockade over Lorance is broken, I'll go there and I'll find Marife. I promise you that."

Dario fought to contain the tears and he almost succeeded.

"Thank you, Edu. Thank you very much. Ah, I almost forget it..." He searched in his jumpsuit and produced what seemed a brown furred Drallian teddy bear with several hand made modifications. The ears had been removed and its fur used to increase the amount of it on the head, in a purposely made ruffled way. The round nose had been painted in black, and small white teeth added over its wide smile. To complete the disguise, two black plastic bands were crossed on its chest, with small silver square pieces glued on, in a decent imitation of a Wookiee bandoliers.

"You can't be back without your gift for Laura. This is the closest to a Wookiee I've been able to put together." Edu took it fighting with the deep emotion coming through.

"Oh, thanks... I'll tell her it's a Wookiee baby. I don't think she has seen enough Wookiees to notice the difference."

"Now you must go. If some of these guys see me crying like a baby I'll have a very low name around here!"

"I'll be seeing you my friend." Edu said.

"You can bet on that." Dario was about to close the door, but then he remembered something.

"One last thing, Edu. When we were in the middle of that battle, we had many possibilities of jumping to hyperspace and run away from there, specially when we had that breath to recharge our shields without opposition. Why didn't you propose it?"

"I don't know." Edu answered. "I've wondered about that same question myself these last days, and I just don't know why. When we were there, I couldn't think of anything else but targeting the next enemy fighter. I was terribly frightened, but if I would have had the hyperspace controls in my hands, I still wouldn't have used it. That pilot, Moose, had just saved us minutes before, and I suppose that we just couldn't run away and leave those people fighting behind us. Furthermore, no matter what I've made you think all these months. I hate the Empire and what they are doing with all of us. It was good to return them part of it."

"That is all I wanted to know." Dario said nodding. "Well, almost all. The other part is... what did you feel?"

Edu grinned before replying.

"It was the most incredible, craziest, frightening... and funniest thing that I've ever done."

Dario laughed and closed the door. The *Little Laura* was driven out of the bay by the tractor beam, and then it was authorized to depart. Edu was thinking of his wife and their daughter, how worried they would be. He had not been allowed to contact them from the *Joan d'Arc* due to security reasons, and now he just couldn't wait to be with them again. He made the Wookiee baby sit on the copilot's seat and attached the belt on it. Only a scarce half of the toy showed up.

"Don't worry, kid, my last co-pilot was not very tall, either."

He pushed the hyperspace motivator controls and the *Little Laura* disappeared into space.

Shok'wave was informed that the communication she had asked about was ready. It seemed that the code that Captain Orris had given her, after explaining what she was up to, still worked. The hologram showed a not unfamiliar face.

"Nice to see you, Commander Krenzel." General Madine said. "I was about to call to congratulate you and White Squadron for your recent victory's consequences. It seems that the *Gray Wolf* never communicated its exact position to the Imperial High Command, so they are still very busy trying to find it. There has appeared some rumors that some guys in the Imperial Intelligence seriously believe that the ship has defected and joined us!" Madine laughed, "Of course, we have helped them out a little by allowing them to recapture one of their TIE fighters with our sign painted on it..." More laughs. "White Squadron did a great job, Commander."

"Thank you, General, but..."

"But you are not calling to hear that, are you?"

"Well, actually I needed to hear it. Now I think you owe me a little favor..."

[Lorance City, planet Iberya]

The stormtrooper entered in a jumbled building, checking that nobody was looking. Some minutes later, a young man exited from that same building dressed in civilian clothes. He started to walk peacefully, and he directed his steps to a particular address. He pushed the call button at one side of

the door, but it remained closed and nobody answered, so he waited, seeming very interested in the scarce traffic in that street. After a quarter of an hour, a beautiful woman with sweet features, approached walking, but she stopped when she was aware of his presence.

"Don't worry," whispered the young man, "I'm a friend."

The woman didn't seem to believe him, and didn't say anything. There was a time when she would have probably smiled to the stranger, and asked him what was all about, but that time had passed away the day when the combat shuttles landed without warning all over the place and the city was occupied by Imperial troops.

"I have news from your husband," the man whispered. The woman's neutral expression disappeared for an instant, her eyes suddenly bright, and her breath hurrying, but she quickly recovered her self-control. That was something she had had to learn since that same day, when her life, as many others, had been shaken and torn apart.

"Follow me."

The woman put her right hand over the lock display and the door opened when the recognition routine identified her. They entered.

"Sit down, please," the woman said, "and say what you've got to say." Her voice was cold on purpose, but her eyelashes uncontrolled motion and her pale face betrayed her real feelings.

"I know that it must be difficult to believe in a stranger like me," he began, "but you must believe me. Your husband is alive, of course he is, and he has joined the Rebellion. He is receiving training to be a pilot in a fighter unit. I'm risking my own life to come here to tell you this."

Something in the man's voice made Marife believe him. A tear began to run down her face, but she didn't bother to wipe it dry.

"He doesn't know that we are trying to contact you. He is growing mad not knowing anything about you."

"Can you give him a message?" Marife asked.

"I can do more than that." He took a little device from his pocket and pushed a small button. "This can take a holographic recording with nice quality. Say what you want. I promise that he will hear and see you."

"Oh, just a moment." she said smiling, "First I must do something with my hair..."

When they were finished, the man prepared everything to leave. Marife said, "Before you leave... there is something that I need to ask you." The Rebel agent nodded, inviting her to continue.

"No." the man replied. "That was just an excuse to deploy their troops on the planet, although we still don't know what they are up to. With the exception of myself today, there has not been a single Rebel in this town."

"Now there *is* one." Marife said with a light smile..

"Are you serious about that?" the man asked.

"Yes, I am." There was a great determination in her voice. The nervous tic had disappeared, but the brightness on her eyes was there to stay.

"Then you will have more news from us very soon." The man smiled and turned to go, but before he opened the door, he said one last thing.

"May the Force be with you, Marife."

"And with you and all those in the Rebellion."

[Onboard the Nebulon B Frigate *Joan d'Arc*.]

Dario was walking towards his room, dressed in his flight suit and with the helmet under his arm, when he met Shok'wave in the door.

"Hi, Dario." Shok'wave began. "You are just the person I was looking for."

"Hello, Shok'wave. What can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if you have chosen a callsign yet, you know, like Shok'wave for me?"

"Well, I believe that there is nobody else from Iberyia in the Squadron... right?"

"No, you are the first one." Shok'wave answered.

"Then, I would like to be known as Ibero." Dario said.

"All right, Ibero it is then." Shok'wave wrote it down in her datapad. "Is that a different form of the word Iberyian?"

"Not since some thousands of years ago. If you're interested about History, I'll tell you about what that name means."

"It will be a pleasure, but first I've got something for you..."

She gave him a little metallic cylinder.

"It's a little holographic recording that I think you will find very interesting."

"Ok, thank you." Dario said as he accepted the cylinder. "Do you want to come and view it with me?"

"No, I better not. I've still got some jobs on my list to complete. You can use your room's holo-player and I'll see you later."

"I'll take a look right now. Thanks again!" The door closed behind him.

Five minutes later, the door slipped open again. Shok'wave had been standing there the entire time waiting for his response. Dario's eyes still contained the glassiness of fresh tears, but his face held the mask of happiness.

"Oh, Shok'wave, I just...!"

"I know." Shok'wave interrupted with a smile. "You don't need to say anything. Captain Orris has some friends here and there, although don't ask me how he does."

"I'll go to thank him personally this evening." Ibero said.

"Very considerate, but I just warn you that he is not known as *Orris the Stone* for nothing." Shok'wave said grimacing. "There is one more thing. The minute after ending that recording, your wife took on the position of the local leader and first member of the Rebel Alliance in Lorange City." Dario was astonished at that piece of information. "From time to time, someone will give you news from her."

"Marife has joined the Rebellion?" Dario asked very impressed. Shok'wave grinned. "Every time I think I know her, she does something else that surprises me!"

Shok'wave laughed.

"We women always do. And now, I think there is a place in the ship you must know. And I hope you are carrying some money in those pockets."

"Money? Yes, I think so." Dario said introducing the hand in one of his pockets to make sure.

"Then follow me, and learn the path to **"The Bomb Shelter."**

"The Bomb Shelter? Are we under attack?"

"Not exactly," Shok'wave said laughing, "but if you exceed with the Blue Stuff your head will think tomorrow that there was an attack after all."

"Hmmm... Blue Stuff...?"

THE END



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