

Once the Star Destroyer was over us, my decision to wait for a while was pretty much locked in. The combination of the Star Destroyer and the surrounding swarms of TIE fighters and other assets made it unlikely that we would survive very long.

We waited quietly inside the interior of the Nova Courier, keeping a close eye on the sensors and the sky, waiting for some sort of change. The skies above us stayed busy for nearly seven hours, the Star Destroyer casting a heavy shadow over us and the surrounding city.

Finally, not long after the seventh hour passed, we noticed a distinct shift in the patterns around us. The dozens of transports stopped, the small army of stormtroopers already deployed. On top of that, the TIE fighters spread out, giving us the barest of openings.

"Boss... It's tight, but it's possible," Tatnia said, having taken over for Nal at the ship's co-pilot's station.

"Any guess how long it's gonna stay open?"

"Not even the slightest, Boss," She admitted, shaking her head. "This might be from a shift change, it might be a shift in screening methods... it might even be a trap. But I have no way of knowing how long it will last."

"...Alright. Start warming her up," I ordered. "I'll go make sure everyone is awake."

I made my way through the ship, waking everyone who had managed to fall asleep over the last several hours. The only place I skipped over was the smallest bedroom, where Yalip was being kept. Once he had woken up from being stunned, he spent about twenty minutes under the effects of near-constant Calm spells, answering sorts of questions that we would need to take off the ship properly, including passcodes and the ship's ID numbers. No amount of proper procedure would get us out of the system, considering we would need to be inspected, but with any luck they would buy us time.

Just over three minutes after we saw a shift in patrols, everything was ready. Nal and Vaz were both manning the ship's blaster cannons, Ahsoka was sitting in the pilot's seat, and Tatnia was ready in the co-pilot's seat. Everyone else was strapped in and prepared in the lounge, conveniently at the heart of the ship.

It really didn't count for much, not when we would be evading a warship with guns nearly a third the size of our entire ship, but it made the kids feel safer.

When everyone was all set, Ahsoka started the ship up, lifting off of the landing platform while Tatnia messaged the area's flight control. She was just feeding them her credentials when the system overrode the connection and cut her off."

"*Clear Sky's*, Ship ID 356332389, this is Quadrant B4 flight control. Foless is under complete lockdown by Imperial order. Land immediately at your previous berth and prepare for Imperial inspection!"

Ahsoka cursed, pulling the ship up and putting on a little speed. Meanwhile, Tatnia played dumb, insisting that we couldn't return as we didn't have the credits to pay for another day of rent. Before she could get too far into her excuse, the control tower repeated its override.

"*Clear Sky's*, Ship ID 356332389, this is your last warning! Land immediately before you are destroyed for disobeying Imperial orders!"

"Punch it," I said, standing right behind Ahsoka. "This isn't going to work much longer."

Ahsoka nodded, and a moment later the ship accelerated, the once Jedi pushing the vessel to its limits. We streaked across the city, leaving the more populated areas behind in a few seconds.

"TIE fighters coming in!" Tatnia called out to our gunners. "Get ready!"

The infamous scream of incoming TIE fighters reverberated through the ship, as did the sensation of both our weapons opening fire. Nal and Vaz made quick work of the first two starfighters to reach us, before shifting around to lay down a pattern of covering fire meant to keep more of them from catching up.

"Star Destroyer is charging its weapons!" Tatnia called out. "It's-"

Whatever she was going to say was completely drowned out as Ashoka suddenly juked port *hard*, almost knocking me off my feet. Before anyone could even think, the sound of tortured, heated air shook the ship, and the cockpit was colored a vibrant green as a turbolaser blast from the Star Destroyer above us attempted to obliterate us.

"Guess they aren't trying to take us alive anymore!" I shouted, holding on to the back of Ahsoka's seat as she continued to juke and weave the ship around.

We continued to dodge and weave between massive blasts of lethal energy, every strike making my heart stutter just a bit. It was impossible not to flinch, each blast more than enough to completely overwhelm our shields and turn us to so much molten metal and boiling organics.

The only positive to the near-constant bombardment was that the scores of TIE fighters swirling around us immediately pulled back to a safer distance when a pair of them were reduced to slag. They were either refusing orders to stay out of the bombardment or whoever was in charge didn't like wasting resources.

Ashoka remind silent throughout the entire time, her hands on the controls, her eyes looking out of the viewport. Sweat poured down her face as she immersed herself in the Force, her hands moving the controls before any sign of the latest energy blast. It was an incredible display of Force intuition, and the only reason we made it through.

After nearly five minutes of constant dodging, the turbolaser barrage stopped. By now, we were far away from the city, passing over much more sparsely populated land. Once the final shot faded, Tatnia took a breath.

"I think we are out of range of their heavy guns," she said. "We should pull out now."

Ahsoka nodded in agreement, silently pulling up on her controls and angling us into the sky. All around us, the TIE fighters moved in, quickly gaining on us with their significantly superior speed.

"We just need to make it out of the gravity well," I said, watching the sensor read out as Nal and Vaz took down dozens of TIE fighter, only to be replaced by even more.

As we climbed higher and higher, leaving the slower capital ships behind, some of the faster ships trailed after us, gaining slowly while we barely weathered the barrage of TIE fighters. Our shields were dropping faster than we could make enough distance. Damage reports started to roll in on Tatnia's console as the sustained damage began to overload systems.

"Tatnia... Send out the call," I said, my second in command looking over at me. "We need more time, and the *Intervention*, *Loyal Hound* and *Chariot* can give that to us! Make the call!"

She nodded and tapped on her controls, opening the hyperwave and reaching out to the rest of our team. As we climbed higher and higher, she sent our exact location, our speed, and vector, putting it on repeat.

"If they don't show up soon, we aren't going to make it," Ahsoka said, looking over at me for a split second.

I looked over her shoulder to her screen, revealing [three separate cruisers](#) moving to intercept us. They were a considerable distance ahead of us, up past the atmosphere, but were directly in our path. We weren't fast enough to evade the incoming TIEs, and if we tried to fly around the waiting cruisers, the swarm of starfighters would completely overtake us. We were stuck in a slowly closing trap. I wasn't even sure our ships would be able to help, the TIE fighters were almost through our shields, we-

"They're here!" Tatnia called out. "And they brought friends!"

Sure enough, in a streak of color, dozens of ships appeared, completing a short micro-jump that brought them just to the edge of the planet's gravity well. Most of them were starfighters, at least two squadrons of them, mostly X-wings and some A-wings. The remaining ships were the *Huntress*, *Loyal Hound*, *Intervention*, and *Chariot*. The *Huntress*, in particular, was surprising since when we left, it was still undergoing retrofitting and was supposed to stick around Omega Station.

"Hold on! Calvaries here!" A comms message came through, the crappy Rebel radio completely camouflaging their voice.

The smaller, speedier starfighters zipped around the waiting cruisers, coming directly to our aid. They passed us in a blur, hammering into our unwanted escort of TIEs.

The larger ships surged forward as well, immediately targeting the closest cruiser. I couldn't help but cheer as they bombarded the *Gozanti*, its shields collapsing in seconds under the sustained fire. As it exploded, the remaining three ships attempted to shift into a better formation.

"Just keep going!" Another voice said through the comms, this one is clearly Calima. "We will jump when you're clear!"

While Tatnia responded, Ahsoka pushed the ship as hard as she could, everything vibrating as she piloted us expertly around the cruisers, which were now well on their way to losing another ship. With their focus elsewhere, we flow around them, past our support, and in a blink, jumped away, our destination long since punched into the astronavigation. As hyperspace swallowed us up, everyone cheered, jumping out of their chairs and shouting in happiness. I could hear everyone shouting from the lounge, but my attention was yanked away when Ashoka wrapped me up in a tight hug, one I was happy to return.

"I can't believe that worked!" She said, a choked-up laugh escaping her for a moment. "We did it!"

"We did. We made it," I said with a smile, chuckling when Ahsoka pulled away, a visible blush on her cheeks. "Well done, we wouldn't have made it without that fancy flying."

She laughed and nodded, the relief of survival washing away any awkwardness or modesty. After we calmed down, and the adrenaline ran its course, I made my way back into the core of the ship, to find everyone celebrating similarly, Nal and Vaz having returned from the gunner positions.

"Well done everyone!" I said with a smile. "The ship is limping along, but we should arrive at the rally point in an hour or so. So, relax, unclench, and take some time to come to terms with what we just managed to do."

Another cheer echoed through the ship before everyone finally settled down, their own adrenaline high now slowly fading as well. It was hard to go from such heart-pounding excitement to quiet and calm so quickly, but soon everyone shifted from wired and wild to exhausted, the last few days finally catching up to everyone.

When we finally arrived at our rally point, we only had to wait a short while before the *Chariot* dropped out of hyperspace nearby. There wasn't much reason to stick around, so after spending a bit confirming the ship would make it back to Omega Station. Once we were done, we used the *Brick* to transfer the kids, Sheora and Nal over to the *Chariot*, the rest of us staying on the *Clear Skys* to make the final jump home.

During that jump, we finally sat down and discussed what we would do with the elephant on the ship.

"We can pay him a good chunk of money," I started. "Maybe poke the Rebellion to buy his ship slightly above what it's worth as well since the ship is definitely burned. The Empire will chase him all over the galaxy if he tries to use it."

"I could send a message to Hera, ask if the Rebellion would be willing to clean the ship, get it set up with new tags and IFF," Ahsoka volunteered. "I don't imagine she would have an issue with that as an apology."

"Why don't we just ask him?" Tatnia pointed out, rolling her eyes. "If he has a preference, we can do that, but if he is difficult, we can just pay him off and drop him somewhere."

We retrieved our unwilling accomplice, and spent a while explaining exactly what had happened, why we needed his ship, and the unfortunate side effects of using his ship. The man was clearly conflicted, understanding that the lives of two innocent children came before his own feelings, but also understandably livid at the damage we had done to his life. After a while, we finally convinced him to take our apology money, a hundred thousand credits, as well as whatever the Rebellion was willing to offer him, whether it was some less-than-legal adjustment to hide the ship's original name or purchasing the vessel from him.

Surprisingly enough, he got a lot less angry when he realized his bank account was now a hundred thousand credits bigger.

Once he was calm, or relatively calm at least, the trip got a lot less tense. He still more or less stayed in his bunk room, since we weren't keen on giving him control of the ship just yet, but I wasn't worried about him doing something stupid and putting us all at risk.

With Yalip pacified, we settled in for our short journey home. It was late on the first and only night of our trip that I found Ahsoka sitting in the lounge, long past when everyone else had gone to sleep.

"Bit late," I said, the Force-sensitive woman looking over at me from across the small common area. "Everything okay?"

"Couldn't sleep," She admitted as I sat down across from her, separated by a small table.

"Wanna talk about it?"

"It's not anything in particular," She explained. "Just... thinking about everything."

"We did good work," I said, leaning back in my seat. "We really beat the odds with this one."

"Could have gone very wrong. Especially at the end."

"Of course. But we knew that going in," I pointed out, getting a reluctant nod. "We worked well together."

"It was interesting fighting with you," She admitted. "I'm still astounded you managed to take down two Inquisitors by yourself."

"Magic has a lot of flexibility that the Force doesn't," I explained. "Lets me do a lot of crazy stuff. You held your own, though."

"I'm rusty," She said, refuting my statement. "I should not have let that Inquisitor hurt me like that. I used to be better than that."

"Well... If you stick around, we could practice together," I pointed out. "Keep each other sharp."

She looked up at me, her eyes pinched in confusion.

"By stick around, you mean..."

"I mean on Omega Station, but I also mean with the Skyforged," I confirmed. "I think you would make a great addition to the team."

"The Rebellion..."

"We are going to be working with them a lot, especially now that we have our own minor fleet," I assured her. "Really the last thing we need to get our hands on some sort of carrier. After that, I will consider stage one of the Skyforged fleet complete and the team ready to start taking on missions for the Rebellion."

"Just how big do you plan on growing your group?"

"Hard to tell, but bigger than this," I assured her. "I would like a decisive fleet, as well as a significant ground force, though that would probably be more focused on commandos than mass troops."

She looked at me for a long moment, before letting out a long sigh.

"I don't know, Deacon," she admitted. "I'm... open to the idea, but I would need to think about it."

"Take your time," I said with a smile, slowly standing up from my seat. "And get some sleep. I have a feeling we are going to have some people waiting for us when we get back."

She nodded, and I patted her shoulder before heading off to find somewhere to sleep.