

X-WING Alliance

The flight yolk jarred in his hands as blasts of green laser fire bit away at the strength of the freighters' already diminished deflectors. The Imperial TIE fighters closed in like cunning hunters, stalking their prey. Ace attempted to yaw the *Selu* from side to side to avoid the incoming fire, while keeping the navigation buoy in his sites, but the old Corellian YT-1300 was a big target and the Imps were pros. He felt a vibration in the deck plates as the top turret fired back toward the attackers in the automatic defensive mode, but Ace knew the trained Imperial pilots would only find the gun to be a nescience not a deterrent. The targeting computer in the turret was no match for the agile fighters. The sizzling laser fire came again, sparking against the remaining shields, his heart jumping in his chest as Emkay's electronic voice yelled out a warning from the seat beside him. Ace's hands flew across the control panel, angling the deflector screens to full aft, and praying the remaining power in them was going to hold. The old YT-1300 freighter had never been designed for this kind of abuse. With the right modifications perhaps she would have been better suited, but until today, her biggest threat had come from poorly equipped pirates and raiders, not from the military might of the Imperial Navy.

"Ace," Emkay began. "You had better do something quickly, the shields are not going to hold. I say we teach them the same lesson we showed the Viraxo and fight!"

Ace laughed nervously under his breath, trying to ignore the modified maintenance droid's pathologic attitude and fighting the queasy feeling the adrenaline in his blood was giving him. Turning to fight the fast moving TIEs would be suicide, but Emkay was right about the shields, they would not survive another attack. In desperation Ace reached up and shut off the shield and laser generators and the *Selu* lurched forward with increase speed, opening up the distance between the freighter and her pursuers. The TIEs fired again picking away the last of the YT-1300's shields and biting into her durasteel hull, vaporizing the thick plating and leaving deep blackened pits. Ace checked the damage control board, noticing nothing he couldn't repair once and *if* he got home. The increased distance and the last of the remaining shields had kept the green lances of light from punching through and for the first time since the Imperial Star Destroyer had jumped into the system, Ace felt a ray of hope.

The distance between the freighter and the fighters made it easier to evade the last ditch efforts of the Imperial fighters as they continued to pursuit. In order for the TIEs to close on the *Selu*, the Imps would

have to take their weapons power generators off line and redirect the power to their engines, leaving them toothless. Realizing Ace's tactic, the TIE pilots continued the fiery volleys of laser fire, still managing to score strikes on their target, further damaging the freighters hull. The *Selu's* control panel sparked, burning Ace's finger tips as non key systems shorted out, but the primary systems remained green as the Corellian freighter came within 1.2 km of the navigation buoy.

"Those Imperial slugs are no match for us, Ace." Emkay called out, attempting to rally his master's spirit.

Ace remained transfixed on the distance to their target as it diminished slowly weaving the ship as randomly as possible, his father's voice ringing though his head: '*A YT-1300 isn't a star fighter*'. Why hadn't he listened? Reaching up he placed his hands over the hyperdrive levers, watching the distance meter click down:

.70 ... The TIE's fired again, as he juked the ship hard right and back left, sending the green bolts flying wide and into nothing but vacuum .

.65... A distance weakened laser cannon bolt slammed into the *Selu* and the shield alarm began screaming as hull integrity dropped below 100%.

.60... The defensive fire from the top turret ceased as the laser charge ran dry as a result of the generators being shut down and a second klaxon filled the cockpit. With the turret cold there would be nothing to keep the pursuers from lining up for a clean clear a shot. A shot that even at a distance would cripple the weakened *Selu*.

.55... Laser fire shot out form the both TIE's as the world around him seemed to move in slow motion, too much adrenaline and input for his brain to process as Ace yanked back on the hyperdrive levers.

The star field beyond the canopy stretched and the old freighter leapt into the swirling sapphire and azure tunnel of light known as lightspeed. Ace collapsed back into the pilot's chair gasping for air, not realizing that he had been holding his breath over that last two minutes. He released the flight yolk slowly, the muscles and joints in his hands ached from gripping so desperately to the flight controls, as he sighed wit the realization that they were safely light years away from the Imperial fighters. The unnerving

realization that he had been terrified, settled over him. He had seen battle before in the *Selu*, but never with pilots better than he was, and certainly never with professionally trained, Imperial fighter pilots.

“Great, Ace. We sure showed those Viraxo dogs what we’re made of. Too bad that Star Destroyer showed up to ruin our fun.” Emkay said with his typical enthusiasm.

“We’re lucky to be alive!” Ace growled weakly, his voice shaky.

It had all started as Uncle Anton’s way of getting back at the Viraxo family for attempting to plant spice in their shipping yards, a substance that would have brought down the wrath of the Empire had there been an inspection. Luckily Ace had noticed the cargo container while doing an inventory run with his older sister, Ameen. They had removed the container from the storage yard to prevent any *surprise* Imperial inspections from finding the spice. That, however, had not been enough for Uncle Anton. He had figured that turn about would be fair play. Disguising one of their other YT-1300s, the *Sabra*, Uncle Anton had Ameen fly into the Viraxo yard and drop her cargo as a normal delivery, while Ace and his older Brother Anton were to hyper in a few minutes later and attack the Viraxo station. The idea had been to allow enough distraction for Ameen to sneak away, and at the same time have the Viraxo call in Imperial enforcement. Once the Imps arrived Anton and Ace would quickly slip away and leave the Viraxo explaining what spice was doing in *their* yards.

It was a good plan, but like most good plans they never seemed to survive first contact with the enemy. Anton and Ace had arrived too early, forcing them to spend more time engaging Viraxo fighters than they had planned while Ameen dropped her special cargo. As she was trying to slip out a wave of the Viraxo fighters got suspicious, and ended up disabling the *Sabra*, stranding her. Anton had been forced to dock his own ship, a Kuat Drive Yard Firespray, with the disabled YT-1300 while Ace provided cover. The Viraxo fighters had not been much of a challenge, but keeping all of them entertained while Ameen was rescued from the *Sabra* had been tricky.

No sooner was Ameen was aboard the KDY Firespray, a wedge shaped Imperial class Star Destroyer came out of hyperspace and into the system less the eleven km from their position. The agile Imperial TIEs launched almost immediately, and Anton wasted little time in undocking and making a run for the nav buoy. Ace, taking his cue, formed up on him and followed closely, but the thought of the *Sabra* and the evidence she would provide both the Viraxo and the Imperials. Looping the freighter around he

headed back toward the crippled freighter as a pair of TIE's changed course to intercept him. If he could destroy the *Sabra*, perhaps the failed plan could be salvaged. After all, the closing TIEs were still far out of weapons range. Targeting the crippled freighter he closed in, opening up all the *Selu's* guns on her. The unshielded metal plating melted under the heavy fire of its sister ship, liquefying the durasteel and spraying it out into the surrounding vacuum where it quickly hardened again. Eventually the red lances of super heated light punched through the freighters thinning metal armor and hit something critical. The *Sabra* exploded into a fiery ball as Ace looped the freighter back toward the nave buoy in time to see his brother's Firespray jump into hyperspace and streak out of the system. Smiling with confidence he throttled to full, locking in the nave buoy into this nave computer. That was when the first volley of laser fire sizzled against the *Selu*. Ace could remember the surprise he had felt with the realization the TIE's had closed the distance between the Star Destroyer and himself so quickly. The cocky smile slid from his face as he realized the grave underestimation he had made, and the flight for survival had begun.

Now, however, they were on their way home, safe in the grips of light speed, a luxury Imperial TIE fighters could not afford. Yet that thought did little to rid him of the nagging fear he still felt from being under the guns of the Empire. He also couldn't help wondering if he would have been locked in a detention cell aboard the Imperial Star Destroyer had they sent TIE Interceptors out after them. Their more agile speed and more aggressive fire power might have given the Imperial pilots all the edge they would have needed to turn the *Selu* into floating debris, or worse.

With that thought came a silent shudder and new understanding and respect for the sentient beings whom had decided to create the Rebel Alliance. They had openly declared their position and voluntarily put themselves under those same Imperial guns daily. That realization made the Rebel cause seem so much more important. As the *Selu* glided through the calm hum of hyperspace Ace understood for the first time his father's desire to help the Rebellion where and how he could. It also made him realize just how dangerous his father's allegiance to the Rebellion was and just how powerful of an enemy the Empire could become.