**Night Raptors**

**TRAINING DAYS**

*by*

Darth Vexatus

*DP Darth Vexatus (Sith) / Battle Night Raptors of House Marka Ragnos of Clan Naga Sadow, #188*

You live only because Master Dejarc requested it.

— High Inquisitor Jedgar Paladin

***Executor*-class Star Destroyer *Avenger***

**Dark Brotherhood Flagship**

**In orbit of Eos, Aurora System**

The Falleen strode down the ramp of the prisoner transport into the hanger bay. He had never stepped foot on a Super Star Destroyer before and what he beheld struck him as even larger than he had expected. TIE Fighters of various sizes and models were parked all across the bay in numerous squadrons that stretched further than his eyes could see. Beside them, many of their pilots inspected their assigned starfighters, all clad in the same uniform shade of Imperial black. But it was no their flight suits that caught his attention.

On the belts of a select few, a recognisable cylindrical shape hung.

*Lightsabers*.

Xanos felt the barrel of a blaster rifle prod him in his back. One of the stormtroopers behind him, who had been assigned to escape him from the High Court of Inquisitors to the flagship of the Dark Brotherhood, barked impatiently: “Keep moving, Prisoner 188.” Xanos felt the rifle jab him again, harder this time.

“And don’t think for a second that I’ll hesitate to put you down,” one of the other troopers growled. “The only reason you’re even still alive is because the High Inquisitor thought it’d be more amusing to watch you go out in a blaze of fire when you get shot down in your first flying session.”

Xanos gave no reply. Even if his arms hadn’t been shackled behind his back, it would have done no good to resist. He was on one of the most heavily armed warships in the entire Emperor’s Hammer, second only to the flagship of Grand Admiral Ronin himself, the *Sovereign*.

Besides…

He tried to shut the whispers out of the back of his mind again.

Whatever the man with the tattoo of a third eye on his forehead had done to him, Xanos had been unable to stop hearing things in the back of his head, as if someone was whispering to him… even when he had been locked alone in his cell, the whispers did not go away…

Slowly, he stepped out into the hangar.

He just wanted answers.

What had that wizard and the Inquisitor done to him? Had it not been enough to suppress his connection to the Force? Even if he had never been trained to be a Jedi, Xanos had always known that he was special; it was why his parents had given their lives so that he could escape the Inquisitors so many years ago…

But they had finally caught him. And stolen the very power that had made him unique…

Only to replace it with… *this*.

**TIE Advanced *Rage Squadron 6***

**Aurora System**

Xanos had never flown his own ship before, but here he was, having been strapped into a TIE Fighter without any training and sent straight out on his first training exercise. Even the Imperial Academy would have been better than this; but this was not the Empire, this was the Brotherhood of Dark Jedi, and unlike the Imperial Navy, Xanos’s squadron commander had made it clear that he did not care whether Rage 6, as Xanos’s call sign now was, made it back alive.

It was a test of strength, and Xanos had been sent out with another new enlistee, whose face and name the Falleen had not even seen, as the other man or woman’s features had been hidden behind the visor of their flightsuit’s helmet, and the pair had been told to show which was the better pilot, as there would only be one joining the ranks of Rage Squadron.

“I don’t understand,” the other recruit had said, “TIE Advanceds do not have ion cannons.”

“Correct, Enlistee,” the commander replied, before he had turned on his heels and headed off without any further explanation. The recruit’s real question had not escaped the commander, however. Ion cannons were non-lethal and only disabled another vessel. The fact the two TIE Advanceds came equipped only with fully lethal laser cannons made it very simple what the two recruit’s objective was.

Despite his having no flight experience, Xanos found the TIE relatively straightforward to fly. He had experience with smaller atmospheric speeders, and so the flight stick and basic controls were rudimentary. That was probably by design, the Falleen reflected, given the rapid turnover of Imperial pilots due to the war between the feuding Imperial factions that had continued to linger in spite of the Emperor’s defeat, and the continued resistance that continued to fight to restore the Galactic Republic.

Xanos’s cockpit lit up in the same shade of green as the Falleen’s skin as his rival’s TIE released a volley of lasers in Xanos’s direction. Xanos instinctively pushed down on the yoke and sent his own TIE into a downward spiral, however much anywhere in space could be accurately defined as ‘down’. His opponent continued to tail him, firing in Xanos’s direction, but so far the shots went wide.

Strange, Xanos thought to himself…

Judging by his opponent’s questions to the commander, Xanos’s rival clearly had at least some existing flight experience and a far deeper awareness of the basic operation of TIE Fighters than Xanos himself—who had none, unlike the other recruit who had known enough about TIE Advanceds to be aware that they lacked ion cannons. The fact Xanos was still alive surprised even himself…

Xanos’s comm crackled to life.

“*Bzzt*… give up,” a heavily modulated voice breathed. “You… *bzzt*… even know how… *bzzt*… fly.”

It was the other pilot.

Xanos had not even realised their comms were online. Not that he had any idea where the correct button was to turn it on, but even if he had, the Falleen likely would not even have bothered, expecting their ships transmissions to have been either disabled or jammed for the duration of the training melee.

His TIE whined as he threw the yoke sideward and began to juke and dive back and forth. Xanos had no idea what he was doing, but… it just *felt* right, and, somehow, not a single one of his opponent’s shots had yet hit home. However, the whispering in the back of Xanos’s head was still not going away…

In fact, even despite the roar of the TIE’s engines and the laser blasts that were constantly streaking right above Xanos’s cockpit’s window, the whispers were getting *louder*. He couldn’t help but close his eyes for a moment and continue on instinct, hoping that he made the right moves—not that he knew what he was doing anyway.

In his mind, he pictured one of the lasers finally hitting home and his starfighter erupting in a fiery ball of flame. The image was so clear, and Xanos even thought he could feel the heat of his leather seat burn against his skin as the leather melted before fire spread through the entire ship, burning Xanos’s skin before the TIE exploded completely, all of which would take place in a split second, albeit in his mind the probable moment of his death seemed to stretch for an eternity as he continued to spin the ship randomly.

When Xanos opened his eyes again, he found himself confronted with a very different sight to the one a few moments ago.

Lined up straight in front of him, his opponent’s TIE was rapidly juking and diving, trying to pull itself out of Xanos’s targeting crosshair. “Impossible…” the Falleen whispered under his breath to himself. He had no idea how the battle had turned so quickly—or had it been quickly? He did not know…

The Falleen pulled down on the trigger and in a split second his opponent’s ship lit up as Xanos’s TIE filled the glowing ion engine behind the other TIE Advanced with laser fire. Just like he had imagined a few moments earlier, flames spread across the ship, but it was not Xanos’s TIE, but his opponent’s that lit up in a ball of flame and exploded, hurling pieces of flaming shrapnel and superheated plasma into the cold void of space… Xanos had no idea what had happened… it was like he had foreseen it…

The comm clicked on again, although this time the voice that came through was clearer:

“Congratulations, Sub-Lieutenant 188, and welcome to Rage Squadron.”