The TIE Defender *Sharpshoot II* zoomed through the blue swirls of hyperspace. Inside its cockpit, Andrelious J. Mimosa-Inahj waited for his fighter to complete its jump. So far, his mission had proven to be an incredibly mundane escort mission. He hadn’t taken part in such a mission since his Imperial days, but the Sith had never forgotten just how boring they could be.

Suddenly, Andrelious was jolted out of hyperspace. His fellow escorts and their charge decelerated into normal space, too.

“That was fast,” one of the pilots observed, but Andrelious suspected that something more sinister was afoot. Sure enough, as he checked his sensors, he spotted a pair of old Imperial ships. An *Immobilizer-418* class ‘Interdictor’, and an *Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer.

“Everyone, we’ve been ambushed. Get ready,” the Archanis Quaestor commanded.

*Let’s see how good the Iron Navy are!*

**1 hour earlier**

**Mattock Station**

**Arx Orbit**

“This better be important, Taelyan. I have a family *AND* a Quaestor job. What I don’t have is free time for errands,” Andrelious said crossly.

“I’d have thought the Quaestor of a House such as Archanis would see that as a chance to increase their unit’s prestige,” Evant replied.

“You Dark Councillors are all the same. You don’t just ask for something, or even try to order me to do it. No, you’ve got to try and get all political,” the Taldryanite sneered.

“And just like most of Taldryan, you make things far more difficult than they need to be. It’s quite simple. The last freighter that we sent to Meridian disappeared completely somewhere along the route. As we suspect that the Collective are involved, we thought we’d ask one of the only Grand Inquisitors we have who can hold his own in space,” the Regent explained calmly.

“I can do more than hold my own. Don’t you know that I was-“

“You’re lucky that you’re not being tried for your involvement in the attack on the *Suffering*,” Evant interrupted.

“And you’re lucky that anyone in Taldryan will even *SPEAK* to the Dark Council after the attack on Karufr. We should probably not discuss the past too much, Taelyan. Kooki is still out for blood over that day,” Andrelious shot back.

“Agreed. Now, back to the mission at hand. We’re sending out a full squadron of the latest TIE Fighter model with today’s freighter. I assume you’d prefer to stick with your TIE Defender?” the taller man questioned.

“You assume correctly. Those TIE/FO starfighters are impressive, but I have faith in my Defender. I am not, however, convinced that one squadron will be enough,” the Archanis Quaestor responded.

Evant nodded. “Again, I agree. That will be the initial force. The *Nightfall* and the rest of its starfighters will be on call. If the Collective is responsible, even you would need significant backup,”

“Alright. If you’d care to introduce me to the pilots I will be flying with, I’ll get them briefed and into the air,” Andrelious stated, suddenly seemingly a little less annoyed.

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“Indigo Squadron, keep in formation. *Bozeman*, I need you to keep well back. That Star Destroyer will tear you to pieces if you get too close,” Andrelious commanded.

The unfolding situation was typical for the Archanis Quaestor; he’d flown in many skirmishes long before he had joined the Brotherhood, and whilst his time with both Arcona and Taldryan had led to his involvement in all kinds of different missions, he was perhaps still most comfortable in the cockpit of a starfighter. His old Imperial Navy training remained lodged as firmly in his memory as ever before, whilst his connection to the Force only improved his piloting well beyond all but the most dedicated aces.

Indigo Squadron were no slouches themselves. They had all been through the Iron Navy’s training program, which had been mostly designed from old Imperial training techniques. An elite pilot such as Andrelious had few problems against the Iron Navy’s pilots, but he knew them well enough to be glad that they were on his side.

“This is Indigo Lead, that Interdictor’s fried our hyperdrives. We won’t be able to proceed without the *Nightfall*,” a voice declared over Andrelious’ comm.

The Sith frowned. TIE/FO starfighters did not usually have a hyperdrive, and the units that had been retrofitted to Indigo Squadron had clearly proven unable to deal with the strain of an Interdictor.

“I’m going to assume you already sent the distress signal, Indigo Lead. Get your squad ready. We’ll have to keep everything off the *Bozeman* until the *Nightfall* can get here,” Andrelious explained.

“*Bozeman* here. We’ll keep back, but our turrets are ready!” an accented male’s voice added.

The *Bozeman* was a YT-2000 freighter, a Corellian model that was the favourite of many small-time smugglers. They couldn’t a large amount of cargo, but they were fast and reasonably well armed. Andrelious had not been told exactly what was aboard, but he’d managed to perform a sensor sweep on the freighter before hyperring away from Mattock Station and ascertained that it was transporting several tons of valuable metals, probably eventually destined onto the galactic market.

As the Brotherhood ships discussed the situation amongst themselves, the Star Destroyer had begun to launch fighters. Two squadrons of TIE/FO fighters closed in rapidly, followed by a pair of TIE Bombers.

“Enemy inbound. Pick your targets and keep an eye on the Bombers,” Andrelious ordered.

“Just two Bombers?” Indigo Lead queried.

“They’re probably not committing them all. The *Bozeman* isn’t exactly the type of ship that needs a full squadron of Bombers. Now, pick a target and keep quiet! We’re outnumbered here!” the Sith hissed, having already selected the unfortunate enemy that was to be his first kill.

The enemy TIEs split into elements of two, resembling old Imperial tactics. Andrelious bore down rapidly on his target, squeezing the fire control the moment his targeting system confirmed that his modified laser cannons were in range. Three of the four lasers slammed into the fuselage of the enemy TIE, the ship’s shielding igniting briefly. The extra power that Andrelious had added to *Sharpshoot II’s* laser cannons were often enough to completely overload the shields of many starfighters, but the TIE/FO’s defences appeared to have absorbed the attack.

Cursing, Andrelious fired again, but his enemy was already executing an evasive manoeuvre. The Sith turned his ship in an effort to re-acquire the lock, but was forced to evade himself as another two-ship element attacked him.

As the fighters began to tangle in a deathly shower of green lasers, the Star Destroyer and Interdictor hung back, apparently reluctant to offer support to their TIEs.

*They might not be able to properly identify who is who*, Andrelious speculated, noticing that the TIE/FOs looked almost identical. He was able to figure out who belonged to the Iron Navy by studying flight patterns. The enemy remained fairly rigid, sticking to Imperial techniques much like those the Archanis Quaestor had been taught, whilst the Iron Navy’s pilots were able to adapt to the situation better.

Andrelious finally got his first kill as he timed firing his lasers into the wing of an enemy TIE that sped past at right angles to the Sith, rescuing one of his wingmen in the process.

“The *Nightfall* will be here shortly, sir!” Indigo Lead announced.

*They’ve scrambled that quickly. Perhaps they were expecting this ambush!* Andrelious pondered as he shot down another enemy. He started to angle his fighter towards the onrushing TIE Bombers, but a quick check of his sensors revealed that the enemy Star Destroyer had launched another three fighters.

“Attention, *Bozeman* and escorts. This is Captain Chambers of the *Durasteel Resolve*. Clearly you’re a little stronger than the last freighter we intercepted,” a voice not dissimilar to Andrelious’ own declared over the comm.

*An Imperial*?

“What do you what, Captain?” the Sith asked, curious.

“You’ve destroyed quite a few of my fighters. You’ve forced me to send my best men into battle. I suggest you turn yourselves over to us,” Chambers replied.

“I think not. *Bozeman* is under my protection. Back off or my squadron and I will destroy the rest of your fighters,” Andrelious countered.

“My orders don’t allow for that. Goodbye,” the Captain snapped.

**Bridge**

**Imperial-II Star Destroyer *Durasteel Resolve***

Captain Chambers was intrigued to hear what sounded like an Imperial accent from the enemy TIE Defender’s pilot. Having served for over four decades, three of them as captain of the *Durasteel Resolve*, he was finally starting to get itchy feet to command one of the newer types of Star Destroyer that the First Order seemed to be producing at a record pace. As it stood, however, Chambers’ assignment called for using one of the older Imperial vessels that had fled from the Core after the signing of the Galactic Concordance. Many of his colleagues from those days were retired or dead, and their sons and daughters filled the ranks of the First Order. Chambers’ own daughter served as an Executive Officer aboard a *Finalizer-class* Star Destroyer, but the ageing Captain remained hopeful that he would eventually be able to retire the *Durasteel Resolve* without a blemish on its long service record.

Chambers watched as the three TIE/sf fighters that he had managed to acquire closed in on the ongoing skirmish. He couldn’t make out how the rest of his forces were doing, but he was certain that the elite pilots aboard their extra powerful fighters would turn the tide.

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Indigo Squadron were doing fairly well against superior numbers. With the help of Andrelious, they had reduced the enemy down to just under a dozen fighters, but they themselves had been reduced to eight, including the Archanis Quaestor.

“Three more coming in, sir!” Indigo Lead announced, having spotted the approaching enemies.

Andrelious banked his TIE around to regard the new arrivals. His eyes were immediately drawn to the turrets on the bottom of their fuel tanks.

“New arrivals are elite fighters! Watch yourselves!” the Sith warned, but he was too late. Indigo Seven, lining up behind one of the TIE/sfs, was blown out of the sky by the enemy’s turret.

Andrelious slammed the top of his instrument panel in frustration. The elite enemies were threatening to turn the tide of the battle, and as good a pilot as he was, he doubted he’d be able to hold them off on his own.

One of the TIE/sf fighters immediately took a special interest in Andrelious, doing its best to manoeuvre into position to hit *Sharpshoot II* with as many of its weapons as possible. The Sith was having none of it, and poured every moment of the thirty years of experience he had, whilst the Force allowed him to stay one step ahead of the chasing enemy.

Meanwhile, Indigo Squadron, though reduced to four, had managed to clear away the last of the enemy TIE/fo fighters and were pairing off against the other two TIE/sfs. The *Bozeman* continued to keep its distance from the two Bombers, who seemed to be finding the Corellian ship harder to deal with than they had expected.

“This Indigo Five! Lead’s been shot down! These new TIEs are too fast!”

Andrelious stayed well back as he targeted a TIE/sf. Rather than close in and risk being cut to pieces by its turret, he s armed his ship’s missile launcher and fired a pair of warheads. The enemy TIE dodged, ducked and dove to avoid being hit by the missiles. This gave one of the survivors of indigo Squadron a perfect chance to land several laser shots on the evading TIE.

*Sharpshoot II*’s sensor readouts indicated that something was emerging from hyperspace. Sure enough, an *Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer decelerated into the area a short distance away from the fighting TIEs.

“Just in time, *Nightfall!* Launch the rest of your squadrons. And target that Interdictor!” Andrelious commanded, not caring if he wasn’t supposed to be in charge.

**-x-**

“*Iron Grip*, you won’t have a chance against that. Prepare to withdraw! All TIEs, we’re leaving!” Captain Campbell ordered.

“Sir, orders are to capture or destroy the freighter. Withdrawal before we complete our mission would be against protocol,” the *Durasteel Resolve*’s Executive Officer advised.

“I’m not risking our lives for one little freighter, Commander! Withdrawal order stands!” Campbell snapped.

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Andrelious watched on as the *Nightfall*’s powerful turbolasers smashed into the enemy Interdictor, even as the enemy vessel turned to begin its hyperjump away.

The TIE/sf fighters that had almost completely destroyed Indigo Squadron had turned tail and fled as soon as the rest of the *Nightfall*’s complement had entered the area. The two TIE Bombers had been easily destroyed by Andrelious before they could even begin to flee.

The *Bozeman* was safe, but Andrelious suspected that Evant would not be pleased to hear of the loss of most of Indigo Squadron.

**Meridian Station**

“So you came up against a Star Destroyer *AND* an Interdictor? Were they old Imperials?” Evant Taelyan asked.

“I believe so. They used Imperial style tactics. And the Star Destroyer’s Captain sounded like most of my old superiors. They did have the newest TIEs, though. Even some of those Special Forces ones,” Andrelious explained.

Evant frowned. “I’ll need you to submit a dump of your ship’s sensor readings. We’ll see what we can get. If they have the newest TIEs, it’s possible that they’re First Order.”

“Impossible. The First Order use their own designs. Not old Imperial vessels,” the Archanis Quaestor argued.

“It’s not impossible that they use old Imperial ships on lower priority missions. They probably have a lot of older Star Destroyers. For now, just head back to your Clan. You’ve helped us a lot today, “ the Regent replied.

“Very well. I will expect suitable compensation for today. If the *Nightfall* hadn’t arrived, I’m not sure that I’d have survived. Half a ton of whatever the *Bozeman* was carrying,” Andrelious demanded, walking off before Evant could reply.

*FIN*