

Crysenia's X-wing began to vibrate as the black outside her viewports lightened to a cold blue. She looked around one last time to see the rest of Red Squadron's X-wings. The X-wing squadrons had been a tongue-in-cheek gift from Appius Wright, given Crysenia's longstanding arguments of the superiority of Rebel-type fighters.

Regardless of his intent, she was using them now, their superior range and firepower allowing her to mount a quick strike into Elysia's atmosphere while the fleet remained in blockade around both Elysia and Ostara. As the dozen fighters began to leave visible streaks in the air behind them, Crysenia's sensors began to light up with red pips. About a dozen smaller pips, fighters, between them and a single larger pip.

"Lead, Three. Looks like a dozen uglies and a *Gozanti*. The *Gozanti* is prepping to launch, so probably troops on the ground."

Crysenia tapped her sensors quickly to double-check, then keyed up to transmit. "Lead concurs. Break by pairs and engage the uglies."

Crysenia followed her own orders and flipped a switch on the right side of her cockpit. She rested a light hand on the stick as actuators whirred and her X-wing's S-foils extended and locked, giving her craft the signature X shape that gave the X-wing its name. She didn't have to look behind her to see if the rest of the squadron was following suit. As she watched, the range between her squadron, now broken up into six pairs of fighters, and the gaggle of mismatched uglies, irregular fighters made from parts of actual craft, closed rapidly. Her screen began to flash and her astromech droid began to chirp, slowly at first, then rapidly as her targeting computer sought a lock on an approaching craft.

"Three. One away!"

"Six. One away!"

"Nine. Defending!"

"Four. Splash one!"

Crysenia's comms became cluttered with combat chatter. Several of her people fired proton torpedoes as the range closed, violet tongues of flame tracing angry lines between her own people's crafts and the enemies. Several of them missed, but two of the uglies shattered as the tongues of flame met their craft and exploded.

Crysenia frowned as one of her own craft joined the pair of uglies as burning wreckage, falling to the frozen ground below. After that, she had no more time to think. She fired a quad burst at an ugly in the first pass. The ugly, an ancient Lambda-class shuttle with no wings, shuddered and began descending with a plume of black smoke following it, but did not break

up. Instead, it fired on one of her comrades, the pair of vibrant green bolts missing as the X-wing in question rolled up on its wing and then upside down.

Crysenia ignored the shuttle, looking for her next target. She snapped her X-wing up onto its right S-foil, and hauled back on the stick to snap into a sharp turn. As she came around, she snorted in derision as none other than a Die-wing came into view. A Y-wing's engine nacelles, mated with a TIE Fighter's spherical cockpit, a thoroughly useless combination of a Y-wing's speed and maneuverability and a TIE Fighter's firepower and survivability.

Crysenia didn't spare the unfortunate pilot another thought, switching her lasers over to firing offset pairs, and sent three pairs of ruby darts landing into the Die-wing. The first pair of darts etched a pair of burn marks into the Die-wing, but the next two pairs lanced into the Die-wing's cockpit and left engine. Both caught fire, and the Die-wing began to list to the left briefly before exploding, sending pieces raining down below.

Crysenia looked around again. Seeing no immediate threats, she checked her sensors to find nine friendly and three hostile signals on her board. She began to vector towards the nearest ugly, an A-wing with a TIE Interceptor's wings, when the ugly shattered, the solar panels blasting away from the A-wing's shattered body as if fleeing a crime scene.

Seeing the other two uglies were out of range and not likely to live much longer, Crysenia began to vector towards the *Gozanti*. "Lead to all Red Squadron. Once you've finished playing with your food, form out at Six Five."

As she was speaking, one of the two remaining uglies disappeared. "Red Five. One away!"

A few seconds later, the last hostile fighter disappeared from Crysenia's scope and the last of the X-wings slotted into the loose formation that the *Gozanti*'s guns forced them to adopt. The cruiser in question's engines revved up, brightening to an eye-hurting white as it began to rise.

Verdant darts of energy spewed forth from the top of the cruiser as it vented its hate at the incoming Ektrosis fighters, to no avail. Only one of the stream of laser blasts hit, bouncing off Red Three's forward shield, dispelling the azure energy temporarily.

"Lead to all Red Squadron: fire two torps at the *Gozanti* and break off. Regroup two clicks magnetic south."

Crysenia again suited actions to words, her left hand flying over the cockpit controls as she set up her twin torpedo tubes to both fire with a single squeeze of the trigger. Her Heads Up Display lit up as she switched to the torpedo fire control system. The cruiser was bracketed by the display, and her astromech unit began beeping with an increasing tempo as the computer sought a lock.

The beeping became a flat tone, so Crysenia squeezed the trigger. As soon as the twin gouts of flame leapt away from her ship's nose, she hauled up and left on the stick. "Lead, two away!"

Her comm was cluttered with similar reports as the rest of her squadron fired. More than a dozen tongues of flame bridged the small maneuvering fighters to the lumbering cruiser. The first several torpedoes spent their fury against the silvery-blue shimmer of the cruiser's shields.

The shields held, at first, before flickering and dying, permitting several of the torpedoes to slam into the cruiser's hull. The cruiser's lights flickered and died as the explosions of the torpedoes erupted against her side, biting into the cruiser's hull right where the stubby wings began to flare out from the hull.

The cruiser's upward journey slowed, and then failed as the moon's gravity won out against the sudden lack of upward thrust and began to pull the wreck down. Crysenia banked back towards the cruiser as it fell, and was joined by the rest of her squadron in orbiting over the cruiser like buzzards until it finally hit the ground. When it did so, the cruiser's last act was to send a plume of dust and flame arching up into the sky.

Crysenia maintained her lazy orbit around the now shattered cruiser and looked around with both her scanners and her eyes.

"Lead to Red Squadron. I show no contacts, anyone have anything?"

The radio stayed silent, each pilot checking their own sensors.

"Lead copies."

Crysenia changed frequencies, joining the Taldryan Seventh Fleet's net. "*Bastion*, Red Lead. Way is clear. 1 cruiser, 12 fighters destroyed, 2 fighters lost."

"*Bastion* copies, Red Leader. Transports are on the way. Continue combat air patrol operations and interdict any new contacts."

Crysenia tapped her mic twice so wordlessly acknowledge *Bastion's* transmission, then switched back to Red Squadron's channel.

"All Reds, Leader. *Bastion* is sending ground-pounders, we'll continue CAP operations until they land, then support as necessary until they're done. Three and Four: head north two clicks. Five and Six: south two clicks. Eight and Ten: since Seven and Nine are down pair up and head east two clicks. Eleven and Twelve: West two clicks. Two and I will orbit the crash site and be on call for backup."

Each element lead acknowledged and the swirl of fighters unraveled as the designated fighters went to the waypoints Crysenia specified. It would be about an hour for the transports, but an hour in a cramped cockpit was easily worth three or four outside of one.

It was entirely too long before the pair of boxy shuttles appeared on Crysenia's sensors. "Lead. Contact, two shuttles, Taldryan IFF."

The loose formation didn't actually change anything, however Crysenia could feel the anticipation as the pair of shuttles landed. Crysenia almost imagined she could see the troops pouring down the ramps of the shuttles and spreading out. She could make out rapid strobes of crimson as blasters were fired in the ruins.

"Red Leader, Charlie Two-Three. Request close air support, north side of the compound, grid 23052 by 19523. Infantry in the open."

"Red Leader acknowledges, Charlie Two-Three. Imminent."

Crysenia rolled her fighter over and banked towards the north side of the compound. As she descended, she was able to identify the firefight she'd been requested to disrupt. One of the troops on the ground was lasing one of the positions with an infrared designator, so she aimed towards the area that was illuminated and set her lasers to fire in sequence. Infantry and light cover wouldn't require more than a single bolt, and this gave her the best opportunity to hit the most targets.

"Two, Lead. Set your lasers to single-fire, and follow once I finish my run."

Crysenia continued her descent, then began to slew the fighter's nose back and forth with her etheric rudder, pumping the pedals continuously. She held down the trigger, and applied light pressure to the stick to spray fire in a cone, coating the area the troops directed her towards.

Crysenia's lasers stopped firing as her capacitors ran dry. She pulled the fighter's nose up and to the right, regaining altitude as she swung around to watch Two's run.

Two let out a woop as he pulled out of his dive. Crysenia looked at the area to find the blaster fire was reduced to sporadic shots. Even those died out after another few minutes. "Red Leader, Charlie Six. Area is secure, you are clear to return to base."

"Charlie Six, Red Leader acknowledges. Red Squadron, let's head home."