

## SKIRMISH OVER TUSORIX

By

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LCM Westric “Dav” Davalorn’s boots pounded on the durasteel deck as he ran towards the TIE hangar. The alarm klaxon echoed down the halls as the *Warrior* went to battle stations. He rounded the corner and ran through the doorway into the hangar. Spotting CPT Adom “Frozen” Wietu by the Rho Squadron Interceptors, Dav jogged over and tossed a quick salute. The Pantoran returned the salute and asked, “Who were you able to scrounge up?”

“Doc and Brent are suiting up and should be here in five,” Dav replied.

Frozen nodded and said, “Ossus and Fame were already on patrol when we got the alert. We’ll rendezvous with them and push on toward the objective.”

“And the rest of the squadron?” Dav asked.

“Still on the surface,” Frozen responded, continuing his pre-flight checklist. “They’re scrambling to get in the air, but we can’t wait for them. They’ll join up with us as soon as possible.”

“Copy that,” Dav replied, and moved to inspect his own Interceptor.

Shortly thereafter, the four Rho Squadron Interceptors screamed out of the hangar bay and headed for Tusorix. Frozen’s voice came over the comm: “Rho Flight, this is Rho One. Report in.”

“Rho Four, standing by,” Dav responded.

“Rho Two, in formation,” stated LT Vapin “Doc” Vanman.

“Rho Eight, locked and loaded,” replied LT Brent “Laser Brain” Hebris.

“Good,” responded Frozen. “Tighten formation while I try to contact the patrol.”

Switching to long range comms, Frozen asked, “Rho Three, this is Rho One. Do you copy?”

“Loud and clear, Rho One,” responded LCM Fame Plane.

“We’re about one click from your current position. Come to point two seven and we’ll form up on you,” Frozen commanded.

Flying at full throttle, it was only moments before they had reached Fame and Ossus. “Rho Squadron, listen up,” Frozen began. “There wasn’t time for a formal briefing aboard the *Warrior*, so here’s the general situation: about 15 minutes ago, ComScan detected several ships emerging from hyperspace near Tusorix. They immediately began forming for an assault on the planet. They are actively jamming our scanners, so that’s about all we know. Our orders are to close with the enemy and protect our forces that are still on the ground until they are airborne. Any questions?”

“Sir, what about the civilian population?” asked LT Alexandre “Ossus” Morgan. “Are we to protect them as well?”

“Only where it overlaps with our primary orders,” Frozen responded. “We don’t know what we’re dealing with here. Although the population has accommodated our being here, Tusorix is not currently under our jurisdiction. The attack occurring while the fleet is in the system might be a coincidence or we may be the target. We’ll have a better idea of the situation once we’re in range. Keep the formation tight and your eyes peeled.”

As the planet loomed closer, Dav was able to get a better visual on the enemy fleet. What he saw sent a chill down his spine. The sharp, triangular, dagger-like shapes of the capital ships. Dav could almost feel the collective tension within the squadron as everyone came to the same conclusion.

“Warrior, this is Rho One,” Frozen said, breaking the silence.

“Go ahead Rho One,” replied the Comms Officer.

“Warrior, we are closing with the enemy fleet,” responded Frozen. “We are still some distance off, but at first glance, the enemy ships appear to be... *Imperial* in design.”

“Wait, Rho One,” replied the Comms Officer. After a moment, a new voice came on the comm channel.

“Rho One, this is Admiral Wolfe. Maintain your current heading to screen friendly forces still on the ground. Other units will handle the enemy fleet,” ordered the *Warrior* Commodore.

“Understood, Admiral. Rho One, out,” confirmed Frozen. Switching back to the squadron frequency, Frozen instructed, “Alright Rho Squadron. We’re at half strength, so we’ll break up into three pairs. Brent, you’re with me. Doc, you’re with Dav. Fame and Ossus, stick together. Watch each other’s backs and we’ll get through this.”

As the Interceptors began to enter Tusorix’s atmosphere, Dav took another look at the enemy fleet in the distance. Those were definitely Star Destroyers, though he couldn’t make out the specific classes. *Could they be modified?* he wondered. The alarm from his long range scanners brought him back to the present. “Picking up multiple unidentified targets,” he announced. “Looks like enemy fighters.”

“Copy that,” responded Frozen. “Maintain formation until we pass through them. Then break off into your assigned pairs and engage at will.”

Dav checked his scopes again. The enemy squadron must have detected their approach, as they had pulled off from their attack run toward the surface and were heading straight for them. *Time for the joust*, Dav thought and grinned beneath his helmet. His grin faltered as the enemy fighters came within visual range. A center ball cockpit, with two vertical wings. *TIE Fighters?! What is going on here?!* he wondered.

Brent’s voice came over the comm: “Sir, those look like...”

“I know,” interrupted Frozen. “Stay focused on the mission.”

Dav watched the distance counter rapidly approaching zero. *Shoot first, ask questions later*, he thought. He selected an enemy fighter in the middle of the pack and sent his targeting telemetry to Doc.

“On ‘em,” Doc confirmed.

The ping from the targeting computer rapidly increased in tempo until it became a steady whine. All at once, a wall of green light erupted between the two forces. Dav’s target was completely vaporized, pierced by both his and Doc’s fire. Two other enemy fighters vanished from the scopes as the rest of the Rho pilots scored kills. Dav flew through the remains of the enemy TIE, debris knocking against the Interceptor’s hull.

“Break!” barked Frozen, and the Interceptors peeled off in three different directions. Dav hauled back on the controls, feeling the pull of the planet’s gravity.

“Still with me, Doc?” Dav asked, straining against the centrifugal force.

“On your wing,” Doc calmly replied.

*Must be a Balosar thing*, Dav thought. He thumbed the targeting selector and, settling on another target, sent it to Doc. The enemy TIE and its wingman were also pulling an inverse loop, headed straight for them.

“I’ll take the one on the left,” Dav called.

The two TIEs finished their loop just as Dav and Doc leveled off for another head to head pass. As the enemy fighters began firing, Dav put his Interceptor into a corkscrew spin and squeezed the trigger, unleashing a barrage of cannon fire. Flames burst from the cockpit of the enemy TIE, but the ship stayed intact as it nosed over and began the long fall to the surface, black smoke trailing behind.

Doc’s target exploded into several large pieces. Both pilots had to dodge the flying debris.

Dav was checking his scopes for their next target when green laser fire lit up the space between the two Interceptors.

“Break right!” Dav yelled as he shoved his controls to the left.

“He’s on my six!” Doc announced.

“Hang tight, I’m coming around,” Dav replied. He continued his wide left turn until he was behind the TIE Fighter that was chasing Doc. Dav squeezed the trigger and watched in satisfaction as one of the TIE’s wings was sheared from the cockpit. Suddenly, an atmospheric breeze buffeted the wing directly into the path of his Interceptor. He attempted to juke around it, but part of the wing slammed into the left side of his Interceptor, crumpling the wing against the cockpit. The impact threw Dav against his flight harness, knocking the wind out of him. The Interceptor went into a dead spin, spiraling toward the surface of Tusorix.

“Dav, come in!” Doc shouted as he followed the spinning Interceptor. “Are you alright?”

“Can’t... control...” Dav grunted as he struggled to stop the spin. He gritted his teeth and fought to stay conscious against the centrifugal force.

“Dav, you have to eject!” Doc advised. “Your entire left wing is demolished.”

Dav held the controls steady with one hand to reduce the spinning while he grasped the ejector handle with his other hand. He took a deep breath and yanked the handle. The ejection seat rocketed up out of the cockpit hatch. Dav counted down the seconds waiting for the emergency chute to open, praying it hadn’t been damaged in the collision. The chute finally opened and Dav winced as he was thrown against his flight harness for a second time. He turned to watch the damaged Interceptor as it plummeted toward the surface, until it vanished through a cloud bank. He waved as Doc’s Interceptor made a slow fly by.

“You alright?” asked Doc.

“Just a little banged up,” Dav reassured him. “Get back to the fight. They need you more than I do.”

“I’ll call in your position so someone can pick you up,” Doc stated as his Interceptor turned back toward the fight above. “Hang in there!”

Dav chuckled and winced again at his sore ribs. *Like I have much choice*, he thought. He craned his neck to watch the dogfight above. He counted five Interceptors including Doc’s battling the three remaining enemy TIE Fighters. *Good, everyone else is still slugging it out*, he thought. He turned to look at the enemy fleet and his mouth went dry when he saw another group of dots in the distance, closing fast.

“Rho One, this is Rho Four,” he stated into his comm.

“Dav, good to hear your voice,” responded Frozen. “You alright?”

“I’m fine, sir,” Dav replied. “It looks like you’ve got another enemy squadron headed your way.”

“Copy that,” Frozen responded. “We’ll deal with these stragglers as quickly as possible.”

Dav anxiously switched his gaze from the dogfight above to the approaching enemy squadron. It was then he heard the distant howl of twin ion engines. At first, he thought it was the enemy squadron he had spotted. But, then he realized the sound was closer... and coming from behind! Dav pivoted his chair around to get eyes on this new group of fighters. He spotted them: five Interceptors coming up from the surface. He was just about to warn his wingmates of this new threat when he picked out the familiar gray and white markings of Rho Squadron. He pumped his fist in the air and let out a whoop as the Interceptors screamed past him and angled up to join the dogfight.

“Rho One, this is Rho Nine,” MAJ Red Taz announced. “Sorry we’re late to the party. Where do you need us?”

“Better late than never, Taz,” Frozen replied, relief in his voice. “We can handle these leftovers if you can break up the squadron approaching from the enemy fleet. We’ll come in behind you once we’re done here.”

“Understood,” confirmed Taz. The five Interceptors changed direction to face the oncoming enemy TIEs. They were just about to make contact when Dav floated into a cloud bank and lost sight of the battle.

A couple hours later, Dav was sitting under a large tree, snacking on a ration pack, when he heard the familiar growl of a TIE Reaper.

“Rho Four, this is Rho Three,” announced Fame. “We have your beacon and are on approach.”

“There’s a clearing about 100 meters south from my position,” Dav advised. “I’ll meet you there.”

Dav walked into the clearing just as the Reaper finished the landing procedure. The ramp opened and Dav boarded the craft. Doc was waiting for him at the top of the ramp. The two shook hands as the ramp closed and Fame lifted off.

“Glad to see you’re in one piece,” Doc commented. “Grab a seat so I can take a look at you.”

“I’m fine,” Dav said, annoyed. “Just some bruises.”

“Would you rather be stuck in the sick bay with the medical droids?” Doc asked, smirking.

“No,” Dav grumbled. He sat in one of the passenger chairs and Doc began examining him.

“So, what’d I miss?” Dav asked.

“Not much,” Doc answered casually. “We finished off the first squadron of TIEs, regrouped with Taz’s flight, and destroyed the second squadron.”

“Any casualties?” Dav asked cautiously.

“Just you,” Doc replied. “We all got scorched a little, but the rest of us were able to get our Interceptors back to the *Warrior* in one piece.”

“Haha,” Dav said dryly. “And the rest of the enemy fleet?” he asked, wincing as Doc checked his ribcage.

“They jumped out of the system after our fleet took out one of their destroyers,” Doc said. He stood up and put away his medical bag. “You’ve got some bruised ribs,” he confirmed, “and I want you to get checked out in the medical bay for a concussion. But, overall you should be fit to fly in a couple days.”

He turned to walk back to the cockpit when Dav asked, “Doc, who do you think they were?”

Doc paused a second before turning to face Dav. “Not sure. I’m guessing the brass will run through the data that was gathered to try and figure that out,” he said thoughtfully. “My money’s on an ex-Imperial warlord we haven’t run into yet.”

Dav nodded. *That would explain the Imperial ships we ran into*, he mused. Although there was something about it that he couldn’t put his finger on. Something that made him... uneasy. Dav looked at Doc and said, “Thanks for watching my back out there.”

“Anytime,” Doc replied. Tossing Dav a casual salute, he turned and walked back into the cockpit, the door closing behind him.

THE END

