

Finally dropping out of hyperspace felt like the first full breath after having had the air knocked out of you. The slowly strangling tension that was swallowing the bridge felt like an approaching storm, but as we dropped out of hyperspace, it broke and was replaced by the same calm experienced by seasoned soldiers under fire. I was confident we could do this, after all, and combat was nothing new to us. It was the moments before the fighting, when indecision and uncertainty still hung in the air, that were tough.

The second we appeared back in realspace, all of our ships, including the Rebels, pushed their thrusters to maximum, pulling closer together as we moved. The MC75 Star Cruiser, which was called the *Necessary Risk*, was the core of our formation and would start at the front of our group. That would change, of course, as the entire point was to keep our ships rotating.

As we started moving, we finally got a clear view of what we were up against.

The first and most prominent feature of our new view was the fueling station, which was massive. It [had a domed "top" with several layers of populated space](#), built sort of in a criss-cross pattern of individual sections, with the many windows showing just how large each section was. Below that heavily populated space were several massive fuel tankers. The storage continued down in a central pillar, connecting to the ["bottom"](#) of the station, which was another heavily populated area, followed by three massive docking ports, each big enough for a Star Destroyer. It was a huge station, with considerably more mass than a Lucrehulk, though obviously differently distributed.

After that, the four Star Destroyers were impossible to miss. Two floated in vague formation, their pointed tips directed away from us, giving us a decent look at their sides. A third Destroyer was tucked into one of the huge ship bays, while the fourth and final SD was pointed away from us, on the opposite side of the station. The two Victory-Class Star Destroyers were floating parallel to the length of the station, close enough to cast a shadow over it.

The last thing I spotted was the flurry of smaller ships flying around everywhere, some around the larger ships, but most around the station itself. Dozens of repair ships flew around it in close proximity, while parts and whole replacement sections were slowly being moved to the ship. Beneath that activity was the whole reason we were here, the damaged section that was responsible for the station's lack of shielding.

It was clear that a large explosion had occurred along one of the huge ship bays, as one of the arms had been blown off, the damage reaching up to the "bottom" portion of the station, a great gash crushed into the hull. Among the debris were chunks of various hull parts, as well as the twisted, burned, and partially melted wreck of a Vindicator. I had to imagine that the ship had been docked when the industrial accident had broken the station.

All of this orbited around a large, clearly dead planet, which itself was orbiting a glowing red sun in the distance. There were two other planets in the system, a gas giant and a tiny frozen planet that was not habitable either, at least according to the records we had.

Even in the few seconds that it took for us to take in our target, our fleet had already accelerated considerably, our target growing larger as we approached, though it was still a far distance away. As we approached, our speed increasing, the *Home One* and its group pulled ahead, just in time for the Empire to finally realize what was going on. They opened fire, thick beams of green turbolasers firing across the gap to meet us. Most of their fire was focused on our most forward group, dozens of shots slapping into their shields, the large ships simply tanking them.

We pushed further, with both secondary groups following the forward group in, taking cover behind their shield shadows. Our group was the furthest behind, and for every dozen shots that landed on the first group, only one or two made it to ours.

Even as we moved forward, our positions in our individual groups rotated, ships pulling forward and moving back. Each ship itself could also rotate, shifting its weakened shield sections to fresh ones. It was mostly following a plan set in the flight computers, which were being updated as we moved and made the maneuvers. All of this would be impossible to organize manually, but with the help of the programmed plan, it was merely extremely difficult.

"First missile barrage incoming!" sensors called out, catching my attention and directing it out to the void.

In the distance, the streaks of blue that followed behind proton torpedoes became just barely visible. They are too far to be targeting us, and instead slam into the first formation. Several ships took the impacts directly, and they clearly did some serious damage to their shields. The smallest ship actually lost its shields completely and was forced to dip deeper into the group for cover. Nothing impacted the starship's hull, so with any luck, their shields would regenerate, but it was proof that this strategy is not infallible.

"Reaching the halfway point!"

Just as my crew announced the crossing point, the first group, still led by *Home One*, began to fall back, allowing the second group to pull forward. It was smaller, yes, but the distance they would have to travel was shorter, which would help keep them from being overwhelmed. We quickly followed after them, sidling up beside them to help absorb incoming fire.

The barrage of lethal green energy continued, with some of the heavier weapons and ships attempting to target the first group, but they failed as we interposed ourselves between them. Their weapons, now aimed firmly at us and the lead group, opened up, plasma slamming into our shields. Again, we shared the burden, damage spread as we turned, twisted, and moved inside our formation. A good amount of the fire was also concentrated on the lead group, spreading the damage out even more.

"Second missile barrage!"

Now I grit my teeth, as we were officially in the danger zone. Missiles streaked from several ships, even the station, making a beeline for the lead group, as well as ours. As they

did, the *Wonder* pulled forward, tanking a pair of heavy turbolaser shots so that they could use their superior point defense systems, as well as their anti-starfighter weapons, to take down the vast majority of missiles before they could reach us. Several still hit us, but between splitting to hit both groups and our purpose-built defenses, the damage was minimal.

"Shields at seventy-eight percent!" my crew shouted. "Average for the group is seventy! *Erso's Call* and *Liberty Rush* both report around fifty percent!"

I nodded and continued to watch as we kept pushing forward, our ships dancing around, absorbing the incoming fire, only to spin or change places with another ship. The pattern, designed by Ackbar and his team, was brilliant and worked just about as well as you could hope. It wasn't perfect, of course, there was just too much firepower involved for the damage to not steadily accumulate, but the rate was manageable, especially as we started getting close enough to use the station as cover.

"One of the Star Destroyers is trying to intercept our path!"

Ahead, I could see that the Star Destroyer that was formally docked in one of the intact bays had pulled away and was now turning to block our path as best as it could. Unfortunately for them, we had seen this coming. We kept moving towards it, not slowing down in the slightest.

Up until this moment, each group had been moving in tight concert, working in near-perfect tune to cover every angle and keep damaged shields rotating out. Not only was it working, but it also pushed the idea that we were three coherent units, sticking together and working in harmony. That meant that, when the units separated, spreading out just enough to pass around the ship, rather than slam into it, the Imperials were completely caught off guard. The Star Destroyer attempting to block us fired as we passed, but their gunners failed to track the fast-moving, suddenly spread out group of ships.

Unfortunately, spreading out did mean that targeting us individually was considerably easier. As we started to spread, one of the more distant ships managed to target the ships with the lowest shields, the *Erso's Call* and the *Liberty Rush*. Several powerful blasts of green plasma slammed into the ships, draining their shields rapidly. Even as we passed the Star Destroyer, their sister ships managed to collapse the *Erso* and *Liberty's* shields, managing to damage each ship. We quickly pulled them back, hiding them from damage as swiftly as we could.

Once we had passed the dangerous Imperial ship, we gathered back into the rotating mass of capital ships, this time forming one large group. Even the group led by *Home One*, which had been purposely lagging behind, caught up as we slowed slightly, swinging around the Star Destroyer and reforming at our back end.

"Optimal range reached!" my crew shouted.

"Transfer power from engines to heavy weapons!" I called out, though it was mostly just to confirm our already-set plan. Still, the appropriate crew members nodded at my command.

As the rest of the fleet reached the optimal firing range, we rapidly shifted our direction, angling along the station, giving our gunners the best chance to lock on to their targets. Each shot counted, as only about half of the fleet was actually shifting its power and preparing to fire. At the same time, the rest continued to shift and rotate, acting as shields, absorbing dozens of turbolaser beams, working together to spread the damage out among over a dozen ships. My sensor operator called out the falling shield percentages of the defensive group even as the offensive group opened fire.

A battery of weapons, blasts of turbolasers, and a barrage of missiles fired out from some of the best armed ships in the fleet, slammed into the station, carving into the unprotected hull. Each impacting beam of plasma, each missile that pummeled the station did an incredible amount of damage, even as the station's paltry weapon stations attempted to return fire. The fuel depot's hull was just not built for a direct assault, and couldn't stand against the barrage.

Within seconds, secondary explosions crossed along the hull, and as we continued to travel up along the station's side, we continued to pour on the damage, boiling away metal plating and carving deep, exposing deck after deck to the harsh void of space. As we reached the "top" of our target, we launched a second wave of missiles, this time targeted behind us, aiming to hit the previously damaged sections, attempting to reach the sensitive fuel tanks, the most armored parts of the station.

Just as the first ships of our large fleet crested the top of the large domed "top," still pouring on turbolaser fire, our second missile barrage impacted, plowing into the already damaged sections. This time the secondary explosions were significantly larger, each one blowing much larger chunks from the station hull until..

A gigantic explosion rocked the entire depot as one of the main fuel tanks finally cracked, igniting the internal fuel. The explosion shattered the lower end of the station, splitting it into several parts as the force traveled up the spine. Weak points crumpled, while secondary explosions spread out towards both ends, cracking the fuel bays into chunks and blowing out hundreds of viewports.

The explosion was powerful enough that our shields took a solid hit from the debris launched by its force. Luckily, the *Erso* and *Liberty* were both tucked away, saving them from further damage.

When the fire cleared, we could see that the station was now in nearly a dozen parts, several of them drifting down, blown out of orbit by the force of the fuel's detonation. Even the domed top had been ruined, the intensity of the explosion blowing out the top like a champagne cork. The station was dark, completely ruined and broken beyond any hope of repair.

"Home One is calling for a full withdrawal!" a crew member called out. "They are shifting to lead the way!"

"Follow their directions, tighten up our formation!" I called out, feeling the ship already angling to regroup, the whole fleet shifting into one spiraling conglomerate. "Stay frosty, we are in the endgame now!"

The fleet pulled together, several damaged ships pulling into the core for protection. As the *Hope* spun around, I could see the *Gimel Staff* and *Light of Kanan*, both rolling around to the outer areas, while one of the dreadnoughts that had ridden in as part of our group pulled in to join our damaged ships, its shields down and a large chunk of the station embedded in its side.

The now-singular fleet angled out from the station, seeking to avoid any more superheated debris. We followed after the *Home One*, which had returned to its speartip position. As we followed after it, the *Hope* saddled up beside it, catching several more turbolaser blasts, covering the damaged dreadnought. All four of the Star Destroyers and one of the Victory-Class destroyers chased after us, managing to just about keep pace with us as we ran towards the outer limits of the planet's gravity well.

The second Victor-class destroyer was drifting listlessly through space, its bridge and thrusters heavily damaged by a chunk of the station hurtling away from the explosion.

As we rapidly approached our jump point, coordinates locked and ready, we were forced to spread out once more, so that hyperspace variances didn't end up sending ships colliding into each other. While we still tried to keep rotating and spreading the damage, the further apart we were, the more difficult it was to compensate, and the less effective it was. We watched as the average shield levels in our ships, and for the whole fleet, continued to drop, lower and lower until, finally, we cleared the gravity well and jumped out of the system.

The sudden release of tension caused cheers to erupt on the bridge, as we went from biting our nails to finally safe in the realm of hyperspace. Tatnia, Ahsoka, and myself were just as affected, as Tatnia let out a shout of success and a string of expletives, while I wrapped Ahsoka in a hug and spun her around, kissing her soundly.

As the cheering died down, I put Ahsoka down with a chuckle, the blushing Togruta slapping my shoulder as I winked and stepped closer to my crew.

"Well done, everyone!" I said with a smile. "That went just about as well as it could have. Once we drop out of hyperspace, I want a full read-up on our shield systems, just to confirm they are stable after that beating. Comms, I'm waiting for a full report on damages. Send it to my datapad once you have the list. For now, enjoy a ten-minute break before we arrive, and again, well done!"

Another cheer rang through the bridge, though this one was more of just a confirmation that they heard what I had said and understood. A few people were still patting each other on the backs, but most had settled back in. Still, the upbeat mood stuck with us through the short trip through hyperspace and beyond.