

It was three days before we finally heard from the dozen ships that we had stationed on the planet's surface, waiting and watching for the Imperial arrivals. The message they sent was quick, so while it was unlikely to be detected, it wasn't impossible, so time was of the essence.

In just about a minute and a half, our starfighters poured from their various hangars and holds, swarming around us into squadron formations and groups. We had an astounding number of starfighters as part of our forces, and almost all of them were here, ready to go. It made me very glad that we had re-created the starfighter control bridge of this ship, though it wasn't in its usual spot. We had buried it inside the starship, connecting it to sensors and large view screens. They may not have an actual real view, but with all the extra computing power and other upgrades we gave them, it was considerably better off than the original.

And for battles like this, they would need every bit of the system we upgraded.

During all of this, ships moving around, getting into position, and sending comms that they were in position, I was on the bridge of the *Hope*. From there, I could watch everyone while studying the very simple scans we received with the message.

The Imperial forces that arrived were not precisely as we predicted. The Victory SD was indeed on its own, a mercy I did not overlook, but instead of a single Vindicator heavy cruiser and a pair of IPVs, it was two Vindicators. This was definitely more of a threat than what we had anticipated. The Vindicators were impressive ships, and two of them with starfighter support could take down something like a Victory-class, though not very cleanly.

The lack of IPVs reduced their overall maneuverability, which I might be able to exploit if I was lucky. Thankfully, after running it by some of my people, we agreed that this group was still something we could handle. And since the target ships were present as well, grouped between the two Imperial groups, it was time to make that call.

As our forces finally got into position, I turned slightly to give the Jedi meditator on deck a look. He was sitting on the special platform we made for him and his compatriots, the major distractions of the bridge dulled by various fields. As I looked his way, without opening his eyes, he raised his hand and gave me a thumbs-up. I smirked and turned back to the forward viewport.

"All ships acknowledge final word on enemy composition," I called out, comms passing my message. Once the confirmations came through, I nodded. "Alright, people. Time is short, so there's no long speech for this one. Stick to the plan, trust your fellows, and may the Force be with you. Good luck."

I nodded to one of the crew, and a few moments later, we started jumping, the slower ships going first, before finally we jumped as well. The shift between lightspeed and normal speed was fast, the jump lasting only a few seconds, before suddenly an entire planet was above us. We had reappeared exactly as I had wanted, "upside down," with our main guns focused directly on the Victory-Class SD. Just to our starboard, the *Fury* appeared as well, as did the *Anvil*.

Immediately, all of our ships opened fire, heavy turbolaser slamming into the Imperial ship's shields, making them shimmer as they absorbed the heavy bursts of destructive energy. As the *Hope*, *Fury*, and *Anvil* concentrated their fire, four squadrons of Heavy ARCs performed their first bombing run unopposed, the ship barely beginning to react as forty-eight proton torpedoes smashed into their shields.

Meanwhile, as we opened fire, our smaller ships engaged the two Vindicators, laying in fire on the two six-hundred-meter Imperial starships. Quickly, our smaller ships grouped up, rotating around each other, almost leapfrogging who was in the lead to keep the highest shield levels forward. This helped distribute damage across the group, drastically increasing their lifespans and sometimes even allowing them to regenerate slightly. They also used their speed to keep one of the Vindicators between them and the other as often as possible, essentially using it as a shield from its pair.

Even as we fired on the Imperial ships, we were also pushing down against our target ships, keeping them from pulling up and out of the planet's gravity well. Our MA-Wings harassed and harried them, while our other ships flew unnecessarily close to them, even as they bombarded the Vindicators. The target ships, three Imperial Arquitens and the Immobilizer 418 Interdictor, even eventually attempted to shoot at us, but most of their shots missed, the skeleton crew clearly too small to man the guns properly.

While we made a lot of progress during our initial ambush, it couldn't last forever. Eventually, the Imperials began reacting, firing their weapons back and scrambling starfighters.

"TIE fighters deploying!" the Mon Calamari behind the sensor console shouted. "Looks like two full wings from the Vindicators, two squadrons from the Victory!"

While a complete wing per Vindicator was an impressive amount, especially for a ship that size, we had them absolutely beat. We had a total of seven MA wing squadrons deployed, and with their strong shields, superior speeds, and superior pilots, they washed through the TIE fighters like a tsunami.

It was so bad that our holoprojector numbers struggled to keep up with how fast the TIE fighters were being destroyed. It was clear that, for now, we had a level of starfighter superiority that dwarfed what the Rebellion had, which only made sense considering the resources we poured into our starfighter squadrons.

"Not looking forward to the TIE interceptor," I muttered to myself as I watched the destruction, eventually tearing my eyes back to our own fight. "Status!"

"Shields at seventy, Victory class shield at thirty!" Sensors called out. "*Forge* at sixty and *Anvil* at forty."

"Pull the *Anvil* back behind us, have it fire around our bow," I ordered, watching the fight out of the viewscreen. "Heavy ARCs?"

"Two casualties, limping back to our side hangar," someone else responded. "Lining up for another bombing run now!"

True to their word, the Heavy ARCs surged forth behind the Victory-Class, splitting into two large groups and laying down another stream of proton torpedoes. Almost all of the explosive projectiles slammed into the shield, but the very last of the barrage made it through, detonating chunks of armor plating.

"Concentrate on disabling the ship!" I ordered among shouts, confirming that their shields were down. "Take down missile tubes and heavy turbolasers first! I want the *Forge* and half of the Heavy ARCs switching targets to the Vindicators, pick one and take it down!"

"Admiral, one of the Arquitens is pulling away from the group!"

I spun to look at the holoprojection, cursing when I spotted it. We were still attempting to herd the Imperial ships further into the atmosphere so they couldn't jump to hyperspace, but one of them must have spotted a gap, as it was pushing through and angling away, using its momentum to force other ships to move. Before I could make the order to pursue, someone spoke from behind me.

"It's not worth it," my Jedi consultant said from beside me, his eyes still closed. "Trying to stop them only leads to more gaps and puts our forces in danger."

I turned to look at them for a moment, before cursing under my breath and nodding. I wanted to say they were wrong, but this was precisely why I had them on our ships like this. I needed to trust their word.

"Forget about the runaway!" I ordered, turning my focus back. "Tighten the web and keep the other targets locked down. We lost one, don't let it distract us from our goal."

The fleet pushed down, ignoring the escaping ship, even the *Hope* descending slightly to help keep our target ships low and locked in place. Meanwhile, another barrage of proton torpedoes detonated along the Victory-Class's armor, blowing large craters along the hull, all while *Hope* continued to slam its weapons flat with heavy turbolaser fire. Suddenly, a secondary explosion rocked the ship, its starboard aft corner detonating in a blinding flash. We must have hit something important, as after our eyes cleared, a good fifth of the ship was nothing but fragmented space debris. The rest floated through space, silent and powerless.

"Send the call out for surrender," I ordered. "Rotate the *Hope* to bring its weapons to bear on the heaviest damaged Vindicator and open fire. Status?"

"Shield at fifty percent, first Vindicator at forty percent, the second at sixty," Sensors called out. "The fleet is holding steady at forty percent average."

I could see the target ships, their many weapons shooting wildly as they tried to help as much as they could, but their shots failed to connect nine times out of ten. Meanwhile, the Imperial Arquiten that blasted through had already jumped. Considering that the closest reinforcements were at least a day away, we were on a strict but generous timer.

We continued to layer fire down on the two vindicators, watching as their shields withstood our weapons, slowly chipping away. Meanwhile, the MA-wings had absolutely ruined their TIE fighter wings, so they shifted to harassing and boxing in our target.

The Vindicator heavy cruisers lasted for a concerning amount of time, and during that time, they laid out just as much firepower as they took. Just the two of them managed to bring the fleet average to twenty percent, clearly looking to do some sort of damage before they cut their losses and attempted to run. Unfortunately for them, our Jedi saw it coming.

"They are looking to cut and run," he warned. "Their crew is starting to panic."

I nodded in understanding, watching the holoprojector while occasionally peeking at the viewport. Just as the enemy ships began to move, I gave the order.

"MA-Wings, *Intervention*, *Forge*, and *Nautilus*, pull up from your positions and pin the starboard Vindicator down!" I ordered. "Keep it from running!"

I watched as my ships moved, biting my cheek. We were all running short on shields, and if I pushed us too far, it was going to start to cost us. Thankfully, we weren't the only people running low. As the two Imperial ships attempted to run, probably inspired by the fact that the Victory was starting to fall towards the planet's surface, pulled in by gravity, my ships cut in. The *Forge*, a [Dreadnaught](#) of just about equal size to the Vindicators, intersected the second ship's path, forcing it to angle down and away to avoid a collision. This pushed it right into the heart of our fleet. While its partner flew away, pushing out past the gravity well of the planet, we hammered the remaining Vindicator shields flat.

"Switch to Ion cannons!" I ordered. "Disable weapons and engines, and start making warning shots to the Immobilizer and Arquitens. Send a demand for surrender to all of them."

Eventually, we managed to negotiate the surrender of all remaining Imperial ships. It was tough, but between carving out a chunk of their shields and assuring them of fair treatment, they eventually caved. The Vindicator only surrendered when we knocked out its engines with an ion barrage, and it began to fall to the planet's gravitational pull. Between the tractor beams of the *Forge* and the *Hope*, we were able to pull it into a slightly more stable position.

While that was happening, ground teams moved out like a swarm, teams moving into all *four* of the ships we had managed to convince to surrender.

Within ten minutes, our shields were on the mend, and we had officially taken control of our target ships. We had them jump, along with an escort, back into deep space to get them out of the area and secure them in case of any surprise visits. Meanwhile, the largest concentration of ground forces was on the Vindicator, a fully operational ship that housed at least a thousand crew and a sizable contingent of stormtroopers.

It took around two hours, but eventually we managed to jump with the Vindicator into deep space.

"Well...That went about as well as we could have hoped," I said, smiling as we finally took to the safety of hyperspace. "An Immobilizer, two Imperial Arquitens, and a Vindicator. I would say that's a pretty good haul, all things considered."

Once we arrived at our temporary destination, however, it was clear the work had only started. Imperial prisoners had to be moved, which meant that several ships of the fleet had to work together to transport everyone to a nearby lightly inhabited world. Once the ships were cleared of personnel, we conducted a first sweep for anything suspicious or detrimental, the slicer droids tearing through the ships' computers. While that was going on, Ahsoka and I met up on the bridge of the large Imperial Vindicator.

"Got a little more than you bargained for, huh?" Ahsoka asked, both of us looking out over the ship. "Any ideas on what you're going to do with all of these ships?"

"Keep them," I said simply, getting a look from Ahsoka. "I know, but all of them would make great additions to our fleet."

"Can we afford to keep them all running, plus convert them into something worthwhile?" She asked. "That's a lot of credits, not to mention a lot of positions to fill."

"I know, it's too much. Which is why the Immobilizer is being mothballed until we have a chance to build back up and let everything settle," I explained. "We send off the Gladiator and the Vindicator, while we work on the two Arquitens. While that's going on, we can save up some cash, slowly hire staff for the news ships, and whatever starfighter we put on board. We can focus on infrastructure, settling in, and stabilizing our production until we are ready to start expanding again. Might be a few months, might be longer."

"You could always sell one or more to the Rebellion," She pointed out. "I know they would kill for any of these. It would help pay for the adjustments as well."

"... No. These ships will go a long way to making the Skyforged Vanguard a viable threat to Imperial forces," I responded, shaking my head. "With them, we could start hitting actual Star Destroyers. I will give them some smaller things, maybe open up our starfighter options for them to build a few squadrons."

Eventually, after a good two days of scanning and searching the ships, we decided they were safe enough to bring to our security checkpoint for some real, in-depth scans and searches. At this point, we had a solid team of professionals working the security checkpoint, with plenty of experience identifying security issues across various ships. Still, given how much we were bringing back, it would likely take them a whole week to finish.

Luckily, we didn't have to wait for that. Instead, we returned home on board the *Hope*, before transferring on the *Chariot* to the *Fury*. I didn't say anything at the time, but I was pretty sure that this would be the last time we would be using the Chariot during a mission, as 1st Group was very underpowered, especially with the loss of the Forward Charge. We would likely be borrowing other ships when we go on missions, at least for a while.

I foresaw major reorganization in our future once our ships began finishing their conversions. For now, it was time to get home and enjoy some time unwinding.