



CHAPTER SIX

THE SECOND BATTLE

Captain Aldaric spun his missile boat between the disintegrating halves of the Nebulon B Frigate Pan. Her sister ship, the Aedgillis, was pulling away from the battle, atmosphere venting from multiple blast points over her main hull.

“The Eradicator is exposed, cover her whilst she regroups with the Decimator.” He ordered. Several First Order Flights, a mixture of the TIE Silencers and TIE Aggressors were closing on the Modified Frigate Eradicator as she made a pass across the bows of the Curia, trying to keep the bulk of the immense Star Destroyer between herself and the second of the First Order’s primary Capital ships – another RSD, this one named the Penitent.

Aldaric targeted the lead Silencer, and linked his advanced concussion missiles. Rather than fire head on, he dropped in behind the Silencer, and braced for the inevitable impacts. The Silencer’s wingman had spotted the manoeuvre, and was attempting to make him pay for it dearly. Aldaric loosed his missiles as soon as a lock was detected, and banked hard away from the squad, hitting his boosters to pull away from the impressively quick Silencers.

“Polo here,” came a voice from the com, “I’m on your tail, dupe him into making a run.”

Aldaric eased his throttle, and made a slow bank right, feigning a returning attack run made a little too slowly. The pursuing Silencer took the bait, and moved to intercept. It was exactly what Polo had expected, and he was able to dump fire concussion missiles into the advanced fighter as he sped past it. Despite its shields, the detonation tore the wing of the Silencer, sending it spinning away into space.

Two down, too many to go, Aldaric thought.

* * * * *

“Bring us around their right flank, and concentrate all fire on the Penitent,” Admiral Mitchell ordered. The bulky nose of the ISDII Challenge swung away from the Curia as several of their secondary ships moved to fill the gap.

Almost the entire fleet of the TIE Corps was present. Each of the four primary Star Destroyers of the TIE Corps, the Challenge, Warrior, Hammer, and Aggressor, had brought their entire support fleets to the battle. Nebulon B Frigates duelled with dart-like Raider cruisers and bulky escort carriers. Strike Crusiers strafed the aft hulls of the two massive Resurgent class Star Destroyers of the First Order, whilst Corellion Corvettes ploughed through enemy fighter squadrons scattering their formations.

The hull of the Challenge rang nosily as debris from several destroyed ships from both sides clattered against her flanks. Her engines flared blue-white, pushing the Star Destroyer as fast as it would go, making to capture the Penitent between the Challenge, Hammer and Warrior, whilst the Aggressor and wider battle groups occupied the Curia.

Individually, no one of the Emperor’s Hammer Star Destroyers could match either of the Resurgents, but with odds of three to one, Mitchell liked their chances.

It was a deeply risky manoeuvre. The point-defence on the Curia in particular was proving vicious. The usual tactic on relying on the elite squadrons of the Corps to take out the capital ships whilst the Hammer or Warrior sat at a safe distance had become untenable. Too many pilots would be lost. They had instead been tasked with engaging the advanced fighters of the Order – the Silencers, the apparent preferred fighter of their upper echelons, and the twin-podded Aggressors, with their powerful turbo laser turret.

Mitchell watched through the bridge viewport as the forward batteries opened up on the Penitent, in tandem with both the Warrior and Hammer. Explosions rocked the hull of the larger vessel, but it continued to return a hellish quantity of laser fire. The Challenge was rocked as the returning fire chewed up her own hull plates. Various officers began shouting damage reports, hull integrity warnings, atmospheric pressure warnings.

“Hold steady, and continue to fire on that damned ship,” Mitchell ordered. This was going to be a long firefight.

* * * * *

Aboard the RSD Curia, Colonel Schueler stalked the corridors, assault baton in hand. It was hardly his lightsabre, but it would do in a pinch. And this was quite the pinch.

As the battle had begun, as he had predicted, the crew rushed to their stations. With a thought, he had compelled the guard beyond his cell door to ‘check’ on the prisoner. The ability to manipulate the minds of others was a simple force trick, and it did the job. Whilst the guard stood confused as to what was happening, Schueler simply walked out the door and closed it behind him, leaving the guard a prisoner in his own cell. He had taken a shock baton he had found in the armament store – it had been a simple matter to lift the code from the mind of the feckless guard. He had also pulled on a security officer’s jacket. It would never pass close inspection, but the troopers of the First Order seemed to lack the initiative to stop an apparently superior officer to request clearance.

Schueler was making for Admiral Pellaeon. He did not know where he was, but he had a very good idea. Stretching out his preternatural senses, he had failed to find Pellaeon, but had instead felt an absence, an area of the ship he could not read or perceive. A null zone. If you were going to imprison a powerful force user, it would be there.

* * * * *

Pellaeon could not be sure, but had he heard something over the cacophony of noise being played at him. The shocks, stress position, light flares and white noise had him wildly disorientated, exhausted and in deep pain. He decided, as best he could, it was his imagination grasping at straws. He tried to steel himself against despair, when his torturous headgear was ripped away.

He blinked in the sudden still, constant light, his eyes viewing it as a dim blur after the garish light display of the headset. A voice was trying to be heard over the ringing in his ears, and he was slowly tilted upright. Hands fumbled at his restraints ineffectively.

“Admiral,” Pellaeon finally made out, “Do you know the source of the force nullification?” The voice was familiar, and not unwelcome, but his senses refused to clear enough to identify it. He gestured at a wall panel, weakly. The figure moved away, and Pellaeon tried to shake his head clear of the disorientation. In his blurred vision, he saw a silhouette stoop and fumble with another, dark shape on the floor. The Silhouette stood, and a bright flash of light made his eyes flinch involuntarily. The loud explosion of a blaster impact filled the chamber, then another and another.

As the blaster fell silent, Pellaeon felt a surge of sensation; the whispered voices of internal thoughts, threads of fate playing over his mind, the connections between everything around him came flooding back. With an intense moment of concentration, he purged the disorientation from his mind, replacing it with the swelling power of the dark side of the Force.

He opened his eyes, and saw Colonel Schueler stood before him, holding out a cylindrical object.

“I found this in the antechamber. I thought you might appreciate it’s return.” Schueler said.

“My thanks, Colonel. I will consider this a partial repayment for your failure to avoid capture.” He tried to maintain a straight face, but Schueler saw through the comment’s desert dry humour.

“I’ll complete the bill with a chiquilla when we get you back to the Challenge,” Schueler replied, already turning to leave the room. Pellaeon followed. He stepped on the neck of one of the small lizards who had helped nullify his force abilities on the way out, putting the dying creature out of its misery.

“We need to head down to the lower levels,” Schueler said, checking the corridor was clear. It was filled with only the unconscious bodies of two guards, and the remains of one of the two droid who had been responsible for Pellaeon’s discomfort.

“Not yet, Colonel,” Schueler replied. “I must first pay a visit to an old friend.”

“Funny,” snorted Schueler, “I was going to say the same thing.”

* * * * *

Prosecutor General Judicis stared at the view screen. Had she enough non-electronically simulated emotion left, she would have felt frustrated.

“General Heliod,” She barked, her electronically rendered voice making her tone even harsher, “You are being surrounded. Take out those Star Destroyers. They are 20 year old Mark IIs. Why are you allowing this to happen?”

“My *apologies*,” growled the general in reply, “We had been focusing our attention on the sizable number of secondary capital ships encircling *your* vessel. But we will redirect our attention to our own attackers. I am fully confident you will be able to handle such *little* ships on your own.” Heliod, Commander of the Penitent and chief strategist on this mission, cut the feed.

Judicis promised to make him pay for his insolence when the battle was won. She wondered which limb he would like to lose?

She surveyed the tactical map. The battle was on a knife edge. Although outnumbered in terms of capital ships, the First Order forces contained far more potent vessels. And her elite squadrons outnumbered those of the Emperor’s Hammer by at least two to one. They were definitely evening those odds every minute, but not without losses. The secondary and tertiary capital ships of the Emperor’s Hammer Fleet were proving a nuisance. They attacked in rolling waves, pulling away before too much damage could be sustained, allowing them to keep up a near endless barrage of turbo laser fire that was slowly whittling down the Curia’s defences. However, her vessel was whittling down their numbers with each pass. Several corvettes and frigates floated dead in space. Rather than destroy them, she had allowed them to drift, creating obstacles the incoming waves of smaller ships needed to avoid, and were reluctant to destroy themselves to clear a path. She would once have found their apparent empathy for their fallen comrades either ridiculous, or a betrayal of the blunt efficiency of the old Empire.

Her thought process was interrupted by an unusual noise. It sounded like an industrial cutter. She turned, her mechanical eyes focusing on the doorway to the bridge. It was sealed as a precaution. Suddenly, a spot glowed briefly, before melting away like running wax. A brilliant, glowing energy spike emerged through the hole, and began to trace a wide circle.

“Security to the bridge!” She ordered, her electronic voice sounding a degree of concerned she had considered technologically impossible.

“No response from security!” a bridge officer called.

“Then cover the door yourself!” She commanded.

As she spoke, the energy spike completed its circuit, and the door collapsed inwards. A figure stepped through, his face still gaunt from hours of intense torture.

“We meet once again, Jancas,” Pellaeon said.

“Kill him!” she barked.

Pellaeon moved faster than she would have considered possible. His light sabre spun with unimaginable speed, fast enough to catch the near light-speed blasts directed against him. Blaster shots were skilfully deflected back towards firers, and soon the bridge of the Curia was filled with the dead and dying. Within moments Pellaeon and Judicis were all that remained alive.

Pellaeon stared into her mechanical eyes, watching them silently as they focused and unfocused on him wildly.

“You are under arrest...” Jancas Judicis began. She never had the chance to finish. Pellaeon brought his lightsabre up, held parallel to his body, and sliced the entire front of her face from her head. It fell, a charred, cauterised ruin on the floor. Her body staggered back, groping at the terrible wound, blood and technological fluids mixing amongst servos and burned flesh. More machine than human, her body seemed to refuse to accept the massive damage and what must be extensive neural trauma.

Pellaeon swung his sabre three more times, both arms and legs fell from the torso as it dropped, writhing on the ground. He turned, and left the remains of his former pupil convulsing on the blood soaked deck.

“Perhaps we will meet again, Jancas,” Pellaeon said as he left. “Until then.”

Schueler met him in the hall way beyond the bridge entrance.

“Done?” he asked.

“Indeed,” Pellaeon replied.

“Then let’s go. We have one more stop to make on the way.”

* * * * *

With the loss of the Prosecutor General, the First Order forces had made to retreat from the battle. It proved their downfall. Leaderless, the crew of the Curia descended into anarchy, no one able to assert authority and they squabbled over seniority. With one ship in disarray, the Penitent fell as it made for hyperspace. The Curia was quickly disabled under the full might of four entire TIE Corps battlegroups.

Forces remained in EH space to be eradicated, but that was simply a matter of time.

Schueler reflected on this as he watched Hawkins floating in a tank of bacta, his new mechanical leg grafting nicely to the remains of his physical one.

General Yoda entered, and stuck a small note on the tank, facing inwards.

“I hear you found him on the Curia?” Yoda asked.

“Yes,” Schuler replied, “seems he’s a hard bastard to kill. They fished him out of the wreckage of his ejection pod after the ambush. What’s the note?”

“Oh,” Yods replied, “It just says that the hit on that interdicator was mine.” And with that, he left.