

Fleet Description

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The first thing Darin discovered out there was that four days was not enough time to grow accustomed to the sheer enormity of the winged MC80 Mon Calamari Cruiser *Crescent Star*. His training had mostly taken place on planets, and in the last eighteen years he was used to being around transports and freighters, not ships more than a kilometer in length and capable of administering a small apocalypse. He felt very insignificant and powerless in its shadow. It was hard to believe that a behemoth like that could possibly need anything from a puny little starfighter.

Darin formed up with Quiver, and they started their escort patrol route, which began at the starboard side of the small grey fleet and continued along the entire perimeter. Darin looked back once over his shoulder while they got into position. *Crescent Star* was doing a poor job of growing smaller with distance.

Over the comm, Darin heard Quiver sigh. "Patrol..." Quiver grumbled, clearly not enthused in the least. "I hope you're fun to talk to, rookie: that's the only way I can stay entertained on patrol, especially the escort ones where we just do lap after boring lap. It was bad the last few weeks when I was the odd-pilot-out numerically and I had to patrol with Snubber and Slurry. Slurry was always fun to talk to, but whenever Snubber would find out we were chatting, we'd get an earful."

Darin wasn't sure how to respond. It sounded like Quiver wanted him to participate in an activity the XO didn't approve of.

Luckily Quiver didn't seem to notice Darin's silence. He continued talking, launching into a story of a particularly memorable patrol conversation with Slurry that Lt. Weas had put an unfortunate and premature end to, and then he interrupted himself in the middle of a sentence and hit the ground running with a completely different topic. "Hey, rookie, have you been properly introduced to the other ships in this fleet?"

After Darin mentally aligned himself with Quiver's new direction, he said, "No, not really. I started reading up on them with those datacards, but--"

"Oh, that's not an introduction," Quiver said dismissively. "Here, I'll show you around now while we're on patrol."

Darin brightened. That was a safe, duty-related conversational topic that would hopefully keep Quiver "entertained." Besides, there was so much he needed to learn about these ships that anything would help. "Sure, I'd like that," Darin said.

"Good. Come on." Quiver increased his throttle, which forced Darin to do the same. "You already know *Star* a bit, seeing as how you live there now, so we'll save her for last."

The first ship they came to was a Bulk Cruiser. "This is *Darkspeed*," Quiver said as he slowed down again. "Her captain thinks she's fast, which she's not. She does have a knack for showing up at the right place at the right time, though, and Captain Selen is good at his job."

“In contrast, I’ll now show you a ship that has a knack for being in the *wrong* place at the *wrong* time.” They passed under *Darkspeed*, and then Darin saw their new course was taking them directly toward a Dreadnaught on the port side of the fleet. Quiver continued, “That’s—um, wait, I have to check my scope—right, that’s *Stellar Echo* up ahead. No one ever calls her that, though; everyone calls her *Bacta Patch* or *Bacta* for short. That nickname even slipped into official reports a couple of times by accident.”

“Why is she called that?” Darin asked. “Is it the medical ship?”

Quiver laughed. “No, not quite. You’ll see why when we get closer. Basically, this ship has seen more than its fair share of battles, and it’s essentially only being held together by bacta patches.”

“It can’t be that bad if she’s still flying,” Darin said skeptically, trying to sort the truth from what had to be another of Quiver’s exaggerations.

“Let me put it to you this way, rookie,” Quiver replied. “The majority of crewmembers on that ship are volunteers.”

“Volunteers?”

“Yeah. Because even the higher-ups are afraid that the whole thing will come apart if someone sneezes. On a good day, I’d wager that no more than 75% of her systems are operating at even 75% capacity.”

By now the two pilots were close enough for Darin to be able to make out the condition of the Dreadnaught. Maybe Quiver wasn’t exaggerating after all. There were gaping holes in the hull, carbon scoring everywhere, and just a general broken-down look that had settled over everything like a thick layer of dust.

Darin stared as they continued to approach. “If that’s true, why are they using it?”

“Two reasons,” Quiver stated matter-of-factly, as if he had been anticipating that very question. “First, it’s good for scaring people off. If for some reason the MC80 isn’t enough to deter potential hostiles, a quick scan showing that, hey, wait, there’s a *Dreadnaught* over there *too* usually is. It’s good for solo missions for that reason, too, as long as you can trust it to not break down on the way. Do enemies know that probably only half of her weapons work? No, not until we engage. But they don’t need to know that for the implications of her appearance to do their job. It’s like carrying around a fake vibroblade. As long as it looks dangerous from a distance, people generally won’t risk getting closer to find out if it’s real.

“Second, and this is the most important reason, is that we’re just that desperate.”

That statement did not inspire a lot of confidence in Darin. “You’re kidding, right?” he asked warily.

“Nope,” Quiver said. “Wish I was. The Rebellion is so undersupplied right now—remember your flightsuit?—that we need every single thing we can get our hands on, even if it’s only held together by bacta patches. Sometimes it seems like most of our equipment is. I’m honestly surprised you haven’t noticed this little situation of ours yet.”

“Well, I had...I just thought it was isolated to the places where I trained.”

Quiver laughed again. “No, no, no. Naïve little rookie, as CC would say. It’s everywhere, and especially out here. This fleet is a prime example. According to the people with more colored rank squares than me, this fleet has an important mission. We’re the only concentrated Rebel presence in this entire area of space. We have to aid allies, try to win others to our side, make strikes of opportunity and keep our ears open for any news on the Imps, all while staying out of sight—or at least out of reach—of the Empire to avoid getting blown up. We’re the Rebels’ only

mobile powerhouse for this area, and it's more space than we can cover, but we have to anyway. To support us, those same people with the numerous colored rank squares have sent quote 'all they can afford' unquote, and so what do we have? An MC80, a dilapidated Dreadnaught, a small handful of escort craft, and a grand total of two starfighter squadrons that aren't even at full strength."

Darin couldn't do anything but absorb that for a moment. He'd thought they had their work cut out for them before, but now...

"Oh, by the way, you'll need to know this. Look up."

Darin blinked and looked up. They were passing under the midsection of *Stellar Echo*, and directly above them was a huge, ugly wound on the underside of the ship. It was a testament to the ship's builders that the ship hadn't been torn apart from whatever blast had caused that.

"You know what part of the ship that was?" asked Quiver.

The younger blond pilot looked more closely, and then checked for other reference points on the ship. He didn't like what his suspicions were telling him. "Looks like the hangar."

"Yeah. The hangar essentially doesn't exist anymore, so keep that in mind in an emergency. They jury-rigged a few external docking ports for shuttles and such, so it's possible to dock with them in the right kind of ship, but if for some reason *Star* isn't around, don't expect to be able to land and go skipping merrily through the hangar after a fight."

Chewing on his bottom lip, Darin frowned and said, "All right." He wasn't sure he wanted to know the answer, but he ventured, "What caused that?"

Quiver chuckled as they cleared the Dreadnaught and turned to port, toward its aft. "It depends on whom you ask. There are numerous stories, all completely different, about *Bacta's* past and each of the major battle scars, and no one really knows which is true. Some claim *Bacta* was an Imperial ship that was hijacked by Rebels at the very onset of the Rebellion. According to that story, the Rebels onboard planted some explosives in the hangar to prevent the resident TIEs from launching and engaging the Rebels' measly starfighter support that was dropping out of hyperspace to assist with the hijack. Others say ol' *Bacta* caught a torpedo or two while trying to fight an Imperial blockade and provide a distraction so some blockade runners could get through and go down to the planet's surface with medical supplies. I even made up my own story and started spreading it around to see if it sticks. If anyone ever asks you for the reason why the hangar is destroyed, swear to them that when *Bacta* was in Imperial hands, a visiting transport's munitions accidentally detonated in the hangar, okay?"

"Uh, sure." Darin doubted he could remember all of that, and he changed the subject before Quiver decided to test him. "What's the next ship?"

"Huh? Oh, that one. That's *Providence*." The Gallofree Medium Transport was staying close to both *Crescent Star* and *Stellar Echo*. "She's the Stuff Ship, but you probably guessed that already. The crew claims they've been able to cultivate a garden and make a tiny little park about the size of five crew quarters and consisting of some real grass, real flowers, a bench and blue painted walls, but no one from any other ship has ever seen it. People have gone into *Providence* specifically to look for it, too, but to no avail. The *Providence* crew only talks about it—they won't show it to anyone else. Naturally, the rest of us believe it doesn't exist."

That piqued Darin's curiosity. He filed the information away in case he eventually became stir-crazy from being surrounded 24/5 by cold metal, like he suspected he would.

The two X-wings were now approaching the aft end of the fleet, and a Corellian Corvette hung there in space ahead of them. "Finally, this is *Windstar*," Quiver told Darin. "She was

salvaged from a scrap yard, but I'm told most of the problems were only cosmetic and we were basically insanely lucky to stumble upon her. The things keeping her from running were simple enough fixes for our mechanics. She runs beautifully. Her captain, Captain Vanaria, claims he fought in the Clone Wars, but whenever anyone asks him for details he tells them to mind their own business." Darin could almost hear Quiver shrug. "Dunno."

There was only one ship remaining that had yet to be the recipient of Quiver's narrative, and that was *Crescent Star*. The two pilots continued on their regular patrol route as Quiver picked up his talk. "*Star*'s the last one, but like I said before, you already know her a bit. Don't be fooled by stories you've heard of other similar ships: each of these Mon Cal cruisers is a bit different. Drives the repair technicians crazy. For instance, *Star*'s bow hangar is much smaller than most others, and it's mainly used by the people with the numerous colored rank squares when they happen to visit. Some people think *Star*'s captain puts them in that hangar so they don't have to deal with all the repair work and the maniac starfighter pilots in the main hangar, and because it's closer to the nice quarters; others say it's because Captain Tralkett doesn't want to deal with those people either and wants them as far away from the bridge as possible. Think about it: aft dorsal bridge versus forward ventral hangar? Makes sense to me. At least this way there's time to prepare while they make their way to the bridge."

Darin wondered what that hangar looked like. Maybe when he got off-duty he'd take a walk over there and see if he could look inside. He wanted to explore the ship a little anyway, if he could ever find enough time. It would be interesting to see how the forward hangar compared to the main hangar, a large ventral one on the aft end of the ship, farther back than he had learned most were on Mon Cal cruisers. There was no doubt that the main hangar was always full of repair work and pilots; would a hangar used predominately by visiting officers be nicer, with less of an operations feel to it?

"And remember what I said about not applying other ships' designs and features to this one?" Quiver asked, snapping Darin out of his musings. "Well, when they stuck the ventral hangar where they did, and don't ask me why in the galaxy they did that, they had to move the primary sensor array forward. On their first test flight after refitting this ship with weapons they found out that the hangar caused a huge blind spot in their sensor readings, and the blind spot encompassed the area where friendly pilots would be making their final approach into the hangar and where enemy pilots would be shooting at the ship's engines. Not a good combination. To compensate, they stuck some additional sensor equipment in the trailing edges of the wings. So, no more blind spot, but now you've got three sets of sensors trying to interface together, and they don't always like to do that. Makes for some interesting days and job security for the sensor techs. So don't expect there to be any wing hangars like on some other ships, because if you do, you'll end up with a mouthful of wing trailing edge. You can be sure they'll get some great sensor readings of you while it happens, though."

"All right. That's good to know," Darin replied. He focused on his sensors for a minute while they continued their patrol, trying to give all the information a chance to sink in and sort out. So the ventral hangar would always be his primary station, and maybe the small bow hangar could be used in an emergency...

Quiver punctured his thoughts again. "A typical MC80, if there is such a thing, can carry three squadrons and various shuttles. *Star*'s hangars are a bit smaller because they traded the extra hangar space for a place to install another backup shield generator. Have I mentioned the repair techs go crazy here? Anyway, so that plus no wing hangars gives us enough room for only

two squadrons and a couple more transports and shuttles than normal. Make sense?"

"Yeah, I suppose so." Less of a fighter screen but an increased chance of surviving direct assaults. Darin chewed on his lip a bit in thought. He was okay with anything that helped to ensure he still had a place to land after a fight, though less of a fighter screen put more pressure on the squadrons and would increase the fighters' odds of being damaged or destroyed.

Life in this fleet was going to be a little more complicated than he'd first thought.
