





EXCLUSIVE FICTION

# BLADE SQUADRON

PART TWO

BY DAVID J. WILLIAMS AND MARK S. WILLIAMS,  
WITH ART BY CHRIS TREVAS

## THE STORY SO FAR...

Cadet Gina Moonsong, a rookie B-wing pilot, has become involved in the Battle of Endor. As the attack on the second Death Star rages, her group is assigned to guard the rear... Until the fearsome Star Destroyer *Devastator* arrives and the the B-wings are plunged into a fight against impossible odds...

It had all been leading up to this moment. Gina Moonsong could see that now; could see how all the paths and permutations of her life had led, inexorably, to this place: somewhere in space near Endor, an absolutely insignificant moon, which was now—thanks to the Empire’s decision to build its battle station there—the most important place in the galaxy. All her time as a smuggler back on Coruscant, all her resolution to stay one step ahead of the law and never to get involved... well, it hadn’t worked. She’d gotten involved and then some.

And now there was no turning back. Moonsong had seen her share of security and police cruisers—had either flown in, or run from, virtually every type of ship out there—but she’d never seen an actual Star Destroyer before. Sure, she’d watched a million holos, participated in endless training runs, studied schematics till her eyes glazed over... but this was different. This was a monstrous slab of metal covered with guns and armor, crewed by enough men to fill a city... the kind of ship other craft never went near if they wanted to live to see another landfall. Every instinct in Moonsong was screaming at her to turn her B-wing around and flee—but somehow she controlled her nerves and held her course, accelerating in toward the *Devastator*. For the first time since she had joined the Rebellion she realized the true magnitude of her situation; the fun and games were over.

All that was left was to die bravely.

“EVERY INSTINCT IN MOONSONG WAS SCREAMING AT HER TO TURN HER B-WING AROUND AND FLEE.”

She pulled into formation behind Blade Leader, rotated her ship’s wing thirty degrees around the gyro-stabilized cockpit in which she sat; Moonsong’s wingman Blade Four executed the same maneuver as he brought up the rear. She didn’t need to check her scanners to know Lieutenant Braylen Stramm and his wing man were matching her course and speed. All the fumbled training missions and mishaps were forgotten; the real thing was underway, and the squadron was rising to the moment, finally working together as a single seamless unit. The ships resembled some great avian flock as they fell into attack formation. On Moonsong’s tactical display the *Devastator* was a huge spinning ball of electronic countermeasures punctuated by an outgoing hail of laser cannon fire. As the ships accelerated towards the behemoth, Moonsong could feel her craft’s S-foils buckling as she struggled to keep on course while hits from the *Devastator*’s laser cannons drained her deflector shield power and rocked the ship.

Unfortunately there were few real options for getting close to a Star Destroyer, except to go straight at it. But at the moment, incoming fire was the least of Moonsong’s worries; they were approaching far too fast for the ships’ gunners to lock onto, and even then it would take several direct hits to knock out one of the

B-wings. She was just starting to think they might make it all the way to the Star Destroyer itself when...

“Stay in formation people! Interceptors incoming!”

Wing Commander Fox’s voice echoed through her headset as a squadron of TIE interceptors poured around the Star Destroyer and rushed in toward her. They must have been in a holding pattern immediately aft of the ship, but now they were deploying in earnest against the B-wing menace. On paper, the mismatch was considerable: B-wings were assault fighters that maneuvered like freighters, stuffed as they were with avionics packages usually reserved for the smaller capital ships. Pilots relied on the complex nav systems to enable them to score hits—but in a ship-to-ship dogfight, the



B-wing was at a considerable disadvantage even with the A-wings that were flying escort. All they could do was accelerate toward the target, hoping that at least some of them would get close enough to deliver their payloads. Moonsong watched as the TIE fighters broke formation and swept past them, executing seamless loops that put them on the squadron's tail, opening up a withering blast of fire all around the B-wings.

Admiral Montferrat could not believe the audacity of these rebel scum. Didn't they realize they were facing the *Devastator*? Vader's onetime flagship, the pride of Death Squadron... Montferrat prided himself on having the best trained crew in the entire Imperial Navy. Ever since he had taken command of her at the battle of Hoth, Montferrat had personally and ruthlessly combed the ranks, recruiting and promoting only those officers and ratings who had met his meticulous and exacting standards. And even though he found TIE fighter commander Gradd personally distasteful, there was no doubt that his skills as a fighter ace were almost on a par with Darth Vader himself. Montferrat watched the engagement unfold on the *Devastator's* giant tactical display. Several rebel ships had been destroyed already; the remainder were taking heavy fire from the TIE interceptors. At this point most sane pilots would have broken off their attack to deal with their pursuers, but the rebels waited until they were deep within the *Devastator's* flak envelope before executing their own high speed turns, insuring the ensuing dogfight would occur in uncomfortably close proximity to the monolithic ship. And the irrational human factor didn't stop there: Montferrat watched as a single B-wing fighter spiraled back, directly into the heart of Gradd's squadron. The pilot knew full well what he was doing: buying time for his comrades. One surprised TIE pilot died in a hail of laser fire from the B-wing's quad cannons before he even knew what had hit him. The rebel pilot then abruptly cut his speed, allowing two TIE interceptors to pass, which he then lacerated with pinpoint shots from his craft's ion cannons. He might have been able to score a fourth kill had Gradd not threaded the needle of fire and blown the B-wing to pieces. Montferrat rounded in fury on one of his gunnery officers who had continued to shoot into the dogfight, hitting one of the B-wings but just missing two of the TIE interceptors: "Cease fire you fool, you'll hit our own pilots!"

The blood drained from the gunnery officer's face—he stopped firing as Montferrat turned back to the tactical display, absorbing the fleet positions of the larger battle raging all around.

"Helm, change course by seven degrees, keep us between the rebel attack force and the Death Star. We'll make sure none of their ships reach the station."

Commander Gradd couldn't help but grin as he zeroed in on another B-wing. Panicked, the rebel pilot attempted erratic evasive maneuvers. Gradd's smile intensified as he fell in behind him and blew out the starfighter's quad engine system with a single shot. He didn't even bother looking at the snub fighter disintegrate as he sped past. There was no question in Gradd's mind that rebel pilots were mostly inferior, if not just outright incompetent. He'd heard a lot of talk about the B-wing before this battle—how they posed an unprecedented danger to Star Destroyers if they could get enough maneuvering room to deploy their weaponry. But Gradd had no intention of giving them that room. Not that it would matter anyway; regardless



of B-wing specifics, Gradd had always placed far more faith in the man than the machine. Though he would have been the first to admit that maxim was double-edged; it chafed him to no end that the most famous pilot in the galaxy was a twenty something farmboy who had somehow managed to blow up the first Death Star. But sometimes luck was a fickle mistress. Unfortunately, Gradd's secret hopes of cutting Skywalker's legend down to size in a glorious ship-to-ship encounter had been dashed when he heard that the Emperor himself had sent Darth Vader to bring the boy to him alive. Gradd would just have to make up for the lost opportunity by killing as many rebel pilots as he could. He could tell that whoever was running the rebel wing of pilots had some combat experience. That was going to make the kill all the more satisfying. He checked his scanner, searching for the fighter receiving the most com traffic; it was an old trick he used to find the enemy wing leader. The tactic didn't fail him: one of the escort A-wings lit up and Gradd locked him into his targeting computer.

"Break, break, break!" Fox yelled into his comlink. Blade Squadron broke formation several thousand meters above the *Devastator's* topside and went ship to ship, an angry swarm of TIE interceptors, A-wings and B-wings buzzing around the gigantic vessel. It only took a few seconds for things to go from bad to worse; Fox's long range scanners picked up a huge electromagnetic buildup around the new Death Star.





good you really are”—and promptly swerved hard, taking the ship through a dizzying set of maneuvers. But the interceptor matched them, moving ever closer, filling Fox’s display with the ominous gray shadow of his foe. His sensors showed its forward lasers charging for the killing shot.

Gradd smiled as his targeting computer locked onto the A-wing. The board lit up green as Gradd unleashed a barrage of fire from the interceptor’s laser cannons—at first cascading off the A-wing’s heavy shielding, but quickly punching through. Parts of the rebel ship began to burn. Gradd was astonished at the amount of damage his quarry was taking while still remaining operational—and even now it took all of Gradd’s concentration to keep up with the rebel pilot’s evasive maneuvering. Back in the early days of the Rebellion, Gradd had once been impressed by these intuitive upstart fighter pilots, making up for skill with sheer audacity and will. Now he’d killed far too many of them to give any credit to their unorthodox piloting.

Which is why what happened next took him so completely by surprise.

At the last possible second Fox flipped his A-wing over, yanking back on the stick and executing a high G-force barrel roll under the attacking interceptor. The Imperial pilot gave up the advantage of pursuit so he could take a final shot, scoring a direct hit on the A-wing’s drive systems, which much to the TIE interceptor’s surprise, did not result in a killing shot. He most likely died wondering why that was as Fox came out of the roll behind him and blew him to pieces. But Fox had no time to savor his triumph; his vision flared red from all the emergency lights in his cockpit, and he became dimly aware that he was choking back blood. He opened up the comm channel.

“Blade Leader to group; if you make it past the fighter screen, execute your primary mission. Over and out.”

Before he could even ponder what the station was doing, a bright beam of green light leapt from its radial cannon and incinerated an entire rebel cruiser.

The station was operational.

Admiral Ackbar and General Calrissian’s voices echoed over the fleetwide com, ordering the rebel fleet to engage the Imperial Star Destroyers. But Fox had more immediate problems at hand, with no less than three interceptors on his tail and two more coming for him over the bubble’s horizon. They had identified him as the leader and were going to try to shut him down hard. Fox dialed back his speed, spoiling the shots of the interceptors on his tail. One veered past him at high speed, forcing the ships on that vector to swerve off to avoid a collision. As the starfighter overshot, Fox’s wingman Blade One managed to get off a bracket of fire, knocking one of the delta-shaped wings clean off, causing it to spin out of control and smash into another interceptor. But Blade One’s triumph was short-lived as two of the interceptors caught him in a cross-fire, opening up so quickly that he probably never even knew what hit him. The remaining interceptor matched Fox’s speed, staying on him despite Fox’s weaving flight pattern. Fox gritted his teeth and leaned forward.

“Okay fella, you wanna play,” he muttered. “Let’s see how

**BEFORE FOX COULD EVEN PONDER WHAT THE STATION WAS DOING, A BRIGHT BEAM OF GREEN LIGHT LEAPT FROM ITS RADIAL CANNON AND INCINERATED AN ENTIRE REBEL CRUISER.**

Stramm saw Blade Leader’s ship spiral off from the attack, obviously fighting to maintain control—so much for Fox, he thought. There wasn’t time to think about whether their leader would survive. It was just one more factor in the chaos of the battle as he attempted to mobilize an attack run amidst the dogfight. But the hysterical yelling in his headset wasn’t helping.

“Too many TIE fighters! We’ve got to get out of here!”

“That’s a negative Blade Four,” said Stamm. “Keep the comms clear of chatter!” His attack computer told him Blade Three and Four were with him inside the Destroyer’s defense envelope—and he knew the ships would be syncing their fire control systems, automatically coordinating an attack package of laser fire and proton munitions.

“I know you’ve got the attack data ready, right Blade Three?”

“I’m working as fast as I can!” said Moonsong. She was facing considerable distraction. Despite the death of their wing commander, the TIE interceptors were redoubling the fury of





their attack; she could see their glittering lights as they maneuvered to get behind the rebel fighters. Then Stramm broke off from the attack formation and swung his craft around to face the fighters on their tail.

"Get that attack data; I'll hold them off."

Moonsong bit her lip. She couldn't worry about Stramm. He knew what he was doing.

She hoped.

The system-wide tactical display was a web of blinking multicolored lights and indicators that stretched from Endor's high orbit all the way out to the titanic battle that raged between the two fleets and the new Death Star.

It was a fitting place for the Rebellion to end.

And yet—despite his satisfaction—Montferrat felt shame that his own part in this had been so less than perfect. He could only marvel at the level of incompetence Gradd had displayed. Not only had his arrogance gotten him killed, it had actually increased the previously miniscule threat the rebel

fighters posed for the *Devastator*. But he wasn't worried—not yet, anyway.

"Fighter control, report."

An ashen faced junior officer stepped forward. "The rebels are down to less than half a dozen ships, sir."

"And our fighter screen?"

"We've sustained major damage to our flight deck and can't launch or recover any more interceptors. Should I signal to another ship for fighter support?"

Montferrat gave the officer an icy stare. "Everyone else is a little busy. Set all weapon batteries for point blank range and fire at will."

Moonsong had a plan. It wasn't much of one, but it was the best her ship's computer could do given the timing. Her nav-systems lined up the angles, finding the pathway through the *Devastator*'s electronic defense grid. She rapidly typed in the new attack vector and hit the transmit while simultaneously lining up the crosshairs projected onto her helmet's heads-up display. Her board went green, indicating that Blade Two and





Four had received the data—but then it suddenly flashed back to yellow. Blade Four's targeting system must have been damaged and wouldn't lock on.

"Reset your targeting computer, Fanty!" Moonsong barked into her comm.

"No can do, the whole system's crashed. You go in without me." Moonsong's scanner's showed a TIE interceptor vectoring in to target Blade Four as he peeled out of formation. Moonsong cursed under her breath; there was nothing she could do—the pair of TIE interceptors on her tail would have their firing solutions in a matter of seconds. Moonsong fully expected the next shots to end her short career as a rebel pilot—but instead both interceptors blew up as Blade Two swept in behind them and took them out with clean precise shots that only an expert could have pulled off. The blasts they'd just unleashed ripped

past Moonsong, missing her and striking the Star Destroyer, impacting harmlessly against its armor. Moonsong knew better than to waste time thanking Stramm; instead she locked flight paths with him. They both pulled back on their throttles, rotating their wings through a one-eighty and bringing their ion cannons to bear, unleashing their proton torpedoes and scoring direct hits on the weak points in the *Devastator's* navigational shielding. The ship's hyperdrive detonated, causing a chain reaction of explosions which blew back into the Star Destroyer's primary generators.

Montferrat pulled out his pistol and shot the panicking officer. So much for insubordination. As klaxons blared and warning lights flashed all around him, Montferrat made his way across the burning bridge to an engineering station and shoved the dead officer who had manned it out of the way so he could see why the drive section had stopped responding to his frantic queries for more power. The answer was as simple as it was definitive: an ion overload had destroyed the cooling manifolds

and ruptured the hyperdrive's magnetic containment bubble, which meant that everybody down in the power plant was either dead or dying, and the ship was undergoing systematic demolition.

"Sir!" screamed a badly burned officer. "The Death Star's shield is down!"

Montferrat looked around at the dying screens. The whole moment seemed like a dream. How was this possible? How had the mightiest space force ever assembled been bested by a bunch of misfits, rejects, and malcontents? He took a last look around the bridge as he slowly pulled off his black gloves and laid them down on the shattered console. He could feel the floor plates shudder and for a moment he seemed to rise into the air as the craft's artificial gravity flickered out. He felt light as a feather, and for some unknown reason the sensation seemed right and proper.

As Moonsong and Stramm's B-wings accelerated to maximum speed, the *Devastator* burnt in their wake. Stramm opened up the comm-channel.

"Blade Two to Admiral Ackbar—the course is clear. Tell General Calrissian he's got nothing but empty space all the way to the Death Star."

"Acknowledged, Blade Two. Good work."

Stramm switched frequencies back to the squadron. "Blade Two to all surviving units, form up on me. This fight isn't over yet."

But all Moonsong could hear was the echo of static—static that had never made her feel more hollow.

"Blade Four here." Fanty's battered ship pulled into formation. "I think we're the only survivors."

"Not quite," said a voice.

Moonsong and Stramm looked up to see Fox's A-wing angling toward them. Even as they took that in, the *Devastator* started to explode behind it, lighting up the ships, a tiny daytime star in the skies over Endor. But Moonsong's elation quickly faded as her sensors told her Fox's ship was experiencing multiple critical systems failures.

"Eject Blade Leader," she said. "We'll recover your pod. Get out of there now."

But Fox's voice was resigned to the inevitable. "I already tried. The main interlocks are fused. They won't let me disengage."

"Hold course; I'll intercept and—"

"That's a negative Moonsong. Regroup and form up to assist the fleet. Nobody's called off the war on my account."

Moonsong hesitated. "You heard the man," said Stramm. Was his voice breaking? Moonsong couldn't tell. She steeled herself, locked course with Stramm and Fanty; the three B-wings veered off toward the rest of the rebel fleet. The fight was now raging all around the Death Star. The shield was down and rebel fighter wings were calling for help as they barreled in to attack the unfinished station. There were still a number of Star Destroyers trying to stem the seemingly endless tide of rebel interceptors. Moonsong watched as Fox's ship faded on her rear screens.

Ahead lay the Death Star. 🗡️

## EXPANDED

David J. Williams and Mark S. Williams co-wrote the short story "Maze Run," which appeared in *Star Wars Insider* #131.

See more of Chris Trevas' amazing art at [www.christrevas.com](http://www.christrevas.com)

UNIVERSE