

The Curious Flight of Rogue Thirteen **By LiAnakin Skywalker (Li Reznick)**

(Rated G - Extended Universe/Alternate Universe – New Republic Era) (Word count - 1,124)

Space over Coruscant was crawling with the remnants of a battle heavily swung in favor of the Empire...as if Thrawn's forces and the two looming Katana class destroyers were not daunting enough, TIE fighters screamed past, darting in infuriatingly close to the New Republic fighters, their sheer numbers infuriatingly elusive to any attempts at interception...Red Leader's voice blared in the ears of the X-Wing pilots now searing their crafts in between dissipating scores of TIE fighters who appeared to be playing chicken...

"Red Four, Five, Eight, pull back...Six, Two stay in formation...bring 'em on back, boys... they're not firing at close range, all they're doing is leading us on a goosechase...they're trying to herd us in and then it's nuclear dinner...no thank you...don't engage...hold off...sending in Rogue Squadron..."

Luke Skywalker sat back in the cockpit of his T-65 X-wing, frustrated, calming himself in the Force and regrouping determination...this was one of those times when he knew exactly what he could pull off in the situation, and it wasn't the same game plan Red Leader had, but he was going to do it anyway.

"Red Leader, I'm doubling back again...I can take these two..."

"Red Five, I said pull back! –"

But of course his words were eclipsed by the whine of Luke's X-Wing, as S-foils sliced through an acceleration...Luke had already gone careening in between the TIE's, twin laser cannons firing just in time to send one of the TIE's spiraling off and into its wingman, and both TIE's were pulverized in a puff of flames.

A moment's victory for Red Five, and Red Leader did nothing but growl out an exasperated sigh...

...until only seconds later it was as though a hole in space opened up to deliver hell itself - four more TIEs – this time TIE/In advanced craft - came screaming out from hyperspace. Two of them homed instantly onto Luke's tail as he swung into frenzied evasion maneuvers, and Red Leader's panicked yell nearly maxed out the volume on everyone's headsets...

"Kreth!!... They're sending them to us double-down now...watch it - Red Five! They're right on you! Red Two, Red Six, stay with them....everybody else PULL BACK NOW like I said!!"

The auxiliary Rogue Squadron was on it's way...but one lone X-Wing approached the Red

Squadron formations first, well ahead of the rest of Rogue's remaining deployment. In the cockpit sat a man who by all standards would be considered ruggedly handsome, especially for his age of perhaps fifty, curly gray-tinged locks spilling out from under the X-Wing helmet, the hint of a scar on his cheek, and eyes unmistakably blue even through the yellow clear visor. He seemed almost too tall for such a craft, his lanky orange-jumpsuit-clad frame filling the seat. With hands effortlessly skimming over the controls of the unfamiliar craft, seeming not to even touch them, the pilot appeared as relaxed and comfortable in the seat as if he were born there...*'I may as well have been'*...he thought to himself, giving a slight smirk. Closing his eyes, he sent out a calming message through the Force to the one pilot in the galaxy who was perhaps as stubborn as he was, if not more so - "**Hang on, Red Five...**" - He didn't have to wonder if the pilot heard the message - he could feel Luke's familiar Force signature acknowledging it, even if the boy didn't know yet where the thought had come from.

Seconds later as his fighter reached the Red Squadron's position, the rest of the approaching Rogue Squadron fighters lurched into formation too...Red Leader acknowledged them as they joined up, and began roll call back and forth...but then one pilot went flying right past them all, heading straight down the side towards the lone X-Wing who was still desperately trying to shake two TIE/Ins off his back...Red Leader's staticky voice started to bark over the comms,

"What the-...!!"

...but then a calm and deep voice interrupted, folding in over his voice like butter melting, quieting him much to his own surprise...

"This is Rogue Thirteen, Red Leader...I've got a clear here, and I'm taking these two off Red Five's hands..."

Red Leader found himself reasonon that he didn't have time to argue, and was on to the next pilot's orders, only seconds later finally realizing there was no fighter number thirteen - Rogue Squadron was a twelve-man team - but by then his comm system began sputtering unresponsively as he tried to call to the mysterious pilot...

...meanwhile Rogue Thirteen was scouring a fast track right up behind the two TIE's, then banking 90-degrees fast to go sailing impossibly in between them, and the deep voice laughed softly...

"Pardon me, gentlemen...mind if I cut in?..."

And a second later he'd banked the craft impossibly upwards, luring the TIE's onto his trail, just as two more TIE's joined. It gave the very puzzled Luke just enough time to swing up, hairpin back over and fire at the first two, taking them down one after the other. He was even more puzzled to hear the man's voice coming through his headset with a soft chuckle...somehow familiar, yet, not...

"...get ready for dessert..."

...and before Luke could reply, the other X-Wing was leading the two remaining TIE

fighters up into a banking maneuver, somehow completely avoiding their fire yet putting first one of them in direct line of Luke's fire, then the other...and with swift cannon blasts there were no more TIE's on Luke's tail...then came the soft chuckle in his headset again, and the reply,

“Excellent shots, both...”

...there were no more TIE fighters in sight,...and Luke exhaled a sigh of relief, whirling in his seat, trying to get a better look at the man in the X-Wing who was flanking him as wingman now, but he couldn't quite see him from that angle...and as adrenaline subsided he tuned into the Force, instantly recognizing the Force-signature which washed over him...he smiled from all the way in the center of his soul, at the sheer blessed surreality of it...

“...Father...”

“...Son...”

Luke turned his head to look, already knowing he would see the man's warm smile, and sure enough he did, then Anakin Skywalker's ghost gave a wink and a slight salute, right before the X-Wing zoomed forward, arching upwards, then suddenly disappeared, leaving only a twinkling backdrop of still stars where it had been.....

Floating there in neutral for a moment, Luke simply looked at the infinity of stars and whispered,

“Thank you,...”

...then he smiled, and simply shook his head, and then began banking his fighter around to return to join Red Leader and the others. He knew without a doubt he'd best spare them the story of what had just happened – *they'd never believe it anyway.*