**A Practical Guide to Malignancy**

Disclaimer: I don’t own Darth Vader. I don’t own the Galactic Empire. And I don’t have the habit to execute my subordinates or the messenger announcing the unpleasant information.

“*Look, if he didn’t want to be fed to my acid-spewing crocodiles he shouldn’t have brought me bad news*.” Dread Emperor Malignant II, the Particularly Petty

**Three years after the Battle of Yavin**

**Outer Rim Territories**

**Anoat Sector**

**Hoth System**

**Super Star Destroyer *Executor***

When the ground opened under his and Ozzel’s feet, Captain Firmus Piett of the Imperial Navy knew that a Sergeant had won the bets he wasn’t supposed to be aware of. Darth Vader was not furious. His anger, already infamously legendary, had grown far beyond that.

Firmus had enough time to wonder how bad it was going to be before the metallic toboggan they were gliding upon ejected them upon the secondary bridge of the *Executor*.

Where they found Darth Vader busy crucifying an officer bearing the insignia of a Lieutenant against the wall.

The screams of pain proved, if there was any question about it, that it was certainly the real deal and that the execution was done without anaesthesia or any pain-removing method.

Despite all his battle-experience and his ability to keep a stony expression, the Captain swallowed heavily. The ground of the second bridge had already several corpses upon it, and only an imbecile could miss that the ‘special pool’ had been installed behind them.

This was why he had always tried to avoid the ‘exhilarating promotion’ leading to the ‘exalted rank’ of Admiral.

The higher you rose in the Imperial Navy, the higher the probability you were called to serve personally under Vader.

“Admiral Kendal Ozzel,” the infamous metallic voice grumbled between hisses as the chest of the crucified man was caved in by an invisible force. “I learned of your career during the Clone Wars, you know.”

Any person would have treated this as a very bad thing, but the Admiral by Firmus’ side was not known for his cleverness.

“Really, Lord Vader? I am-“

“I always considered that one of the largest evidence of Separatist incompetence was their inability to defeat you,” the Fist of His Imperial Majesty continued. “Reports of competent officers were unsure if you were disloyal, easily manipulated, or just of a stupidity breaking human limitations.”

“Lord Vader, I must protest-“

“I have seen non-human pirates displaying more courage and tactical skills than you.”

“Lord Vader, I must-‘

“You will be pleased to know I have ordered a complete inspection of certain Naval Academies in the Core. If they are able to train someone like you, there’s no telling how many imbeciles they have waiting at the Navy headquarters. And I am also going to personally go to your homeworld of Carida the moment the rebellion is removed from my list of problems. Many people say that stupidity is genetic, and in your case I am not sure a long study is going to disprove the theory.”

“Lord Vader, I-“

No more words went out of the mouth of Ozzel, as the man suddenly paled and began to struggle, his hands finding themselves against his throat trying to release an invisible grip which caused him terrible breathing problems.

“Not only you have the gall to contest my exquisite plan when I explained it to you, ex-Admiral, you had the idiotic temerity to change it for one of your nonsensical ideas! The rebels are aware of our presence now, and have activated their energy shields, preventing an easy and crushing victory! What do you have to say for yourself?”

“GAAAAH!” the...the sorcery Vader used momentarily disappeared, and Kendal Ozzel fell on his knees.

“Gaah?” The Grand Marshal of the Empire inclined his sinister helmet in a very disapproving expression. “Pathetic, and not even expressed correctly. I’ve known droids who had more guts than you, and who faced death with more dignity.”

Darth Vader paused. Firmus and most of the officers present on the secondary bridge, minus Ozzel, winced and prepared for the worst.

“After deep reflexion, I have decided you won’t be crucified.”

“My Lord, thank you!”

“My reptilian pets deserve a meal, and I want to see if your stupidity has contaminated your flesh or if it’s just one of these nonsensical proverbs.”

The same powers which had almost killed Ozzel by strangulation were felt again as the current highest ranked representative of the Navy went flying into the large pool specially built there on Vader’s orders.

It took less than three seconds for the carnivorous species swimming in it to acknowledge the arrival of the disgraced Admiral. From that point, their aggression and hunger ensured they swarmed Ozzel in less than five seconds and as their large maws opened, all Navy and Army commanding officers were given excellent views of the creatures’ fangs and claws.

The colour of the water had been a mixture of blue and green until now. As Ozzel was devoured body part by body part, the shade could be best described as a deep crimson. Soon enough, even the bones would be devoured. The reptiles’ fangs had no difficulties digesting bones if given the time.

“Now that I have properly explained to you the price of disobeying my orders,” Vader commented as if it was perfectly natural to murder an Admiral in such a way, but given his infamous career, it probably was...for him, anyway. “Let’s return to the battle against the rebels. With the incompetence of Admiral Ozzel having destroyed our original plans, what are your suggestions...Admiral Piett?”

The tone was sufficiently threatening that Firmus Piett found zero joy in his mind and body about his sudden and prestigious ‘promotion’.

“The energy shields of the rebels may be able to resist the bombardment of this fleet, Lord Vader, but as proved by the information provided by the Viper probes, they were forced to build cooling conduits on the surface and extensive structures to better stabilise the energetic projections. I think a close blockade coordinated with a full-fledged ground assault is the best strategy we have available now.”

It was obviously not going to be cheap for the Imperial stormtroopers. Every scrap of information the Empire had been able to obtain on Hoth suggested extremely hostile weather and terrain conditions on the surface, where a lot of armoured vehicles and artillery support wouldn’t be able to be deployed. The rebels, on the other hand, were solidly entrenched. They had weeks at best, months at worst, to fortify themselves and build their defences. At this moment, Piett was thanking his parents for having pushed him to choose the Navy over the Army.

Whatever Vader had been able to answer, the Captain-promoted-Admiral would never know, as the enemy chose this moment to hit the Imperial I-class Star Destroyer *Tyrant* with what was certainly a super-battery of ion cannons. The less said about the medium GR-75 transport and the two X-Wings painted in rebel colours which escaped, the better.

And now the legendary temper of the dark-armoured supreme commander of Death Squadron was gaining in viciousness and the punishment didn’t wait long to arrive.

“Captain Lennox, this error was your last!” the commanding officer of the Tyrant, who had deliberately approached the sixth planet of the Hoth system to be in firing position before the other Star Destroyers, had not the time to protest and died as his throat was crushed by the same invisible force which had brought Ozzel to his knees. “Lieutenant Cabbel, you are now in command. Congratulations, *Captain* Cabbel. Repair the damaged systems of the *Tyrant* and return in formation with the *Avarice* in the next fifteen minutes.”

The former Lieutenant nodded vigorously and saluted before cutting the formation. Piett didn’t blame his celerity. No ‘or else’ or ‘don’t fail me, Captain’ had been uttered, but the corpse of your predecessor was a message which could rarely be mistaken for something else.

“Admiral Piett.”

“Yes, Lord Vader?”

“Your plan is not devoid of qualities, but time is playing against us here. Moreover, the rebels are forced to open their energy shields to fire at us and allow their transports to escape the planet. As such, I want a full orbital bombardment against this shield.”

“To avoid the fate of the *Tyrant*, we will have to rely on our turbolasers at long-range, my Lord,” Piett took great care to phase it as the description of a tactical outcome, not as a protestation. “With our...distinct lack of precision, the collateral damage to the planet and the ground upheavals it will cause will make difficult the deployment of Major-General Veers’ troops if we decide on a ground assault after all.”

“They are *heroes* in this base,” Vader replied with such venom that several bridge officers took a step back. “And I have a pattern of three with Skywalker. They will survive no matter what Death Squadron unleashes against them. And who cares about the frozen wastes of Hoth when we have already destroyed Alderaan?”

Silently, Firmus Piett really acknowledged the good sense of the Imperial propagandists and the newspapers to stay as far away as physically possible from the Grand Marshal of the Galactic Empire.

“Order all heavy and medium turbolaser batteries to concentrate their fire on Sector T-7,” the newly promoted Admiral ordered to his chief of staff. “The *Executor*’s fire must target the zone where we have visual confirmation of energy generators. Our Imperial II escorts will detect all fluctuations in the field and strike at any opening the rebels provide us. Launch a third of our TIE fighters. With no ground forces to strike against, I expect we are going to see X-Wings very soon.”

The result of his orders was visible in mere seconds. The red energy of the turbolasers began to strike the energy field defending the rebel base, and for the first seconds, it was deflected and nothing happened.

But as more and more batteries of the Executor fired, soon joined by the ‘minor’ addition of twenty-nine Star Destroyers, the dangers of having only a theatre shield instead of a planetary shield became all too evident. The shots deflected by the shields were energy too, and all this energy had to go *somewhere*.

As the turbolaser fire of the Super Star Destroyer was compared by engineers as a miniature volcanic explosion sometimes and Hoth VI was a very cold planet, the result was unavoidably...a lot of vapour. It was extremely eye-catching viewed from orbit. On the ground, things had to be more on the side of disastrous and cataclysmic, depending on how many cubic metres of water were released at once near the rebel defences.

It also gave the Imperial Star Destroyers firing at it the exact dimensions of the shield. As the bombardment continued and new orders were barked, the rebels’ sole and only major protection had to pour energy to resist the turbolasers and the explosions and water-shockwaves of icebergs melting in a few seconds.

“This is a cliff they won’t be able to jump from,” Vader declared as observing the detail of the operations from his command seat. “And at last, I will be able to have a proper conversation with the youngster who believed it was a good idea to destroy our *Death Star*.”

Vader’s voice, for reasons Firmus preferred not to think too much about, was dripping eagerness and malice.

“Incidentally, send a message to Imperial Centre, low priority, black clearance. His Majesty must be informed I have once again decided to raise the quota of officers I am allowed to execute per year.”

Everyone on the secondary bridge busied himself or herself with the actualisation of the bombardment orders. They had no desire to be the ‘plus one’ in the aforementioned quotas.

“Lord Vader! A message from the rebels! They are saying...ARRGH!”

Firmus turned fast enough to see the scapegoat chosen by the officers of the holo-communications’ section be splattered against the wall, smoking and screaming.

“Who...do they think...they are?” Each word was accompanied by a scream of agony of his current victim. “Does...Skywalker...believe...he...is...a...match...for me?”

The messenger fell silent.

“I am **Malignant**,” the terror of Admirals and rebels alike hissed furiously, “Admiral Piett, stop the bombardment. I have decided a death by turbolaser is too good for them!”

Everyone stayed very quiet and for several seconds, this part of the Executor was as quiet as a graveyard in rainy season. The rebels were dead...if they were lucky, they would die weapons in hand. Being prisoners aboard the *Executor* was a fate difficult to wish to your worst enemy...

**Author’s note**: the officers of the Imperial Navy were already suffering from Vader’s tantrum in canon, with Malignant at the helm, things have definitely gotten worse. And it’s not over...

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