

“After we decant from Hyperspace the *Aegis*, *Triumph*, and *Dreadhammer* will remain at the edge of the System until we hear All Clear from you. Do you have any questions, Colonel?”

Shanree unpaired the datapad from his neural link, allowing him to parse the information on the screen without eyes, “None. Get in, disable the shields, send the All Clear. I’m wondering where the hard part will be.”

The *Aegis*’s Executive Officer smiled apologetically, “It is what it is. You take those planetary shields down and we’ll do the heavy lifting from there.”

“Now hear this:” there was a shrill tone played over the Ship’s 1A public address system, “The Captain has indicated we will be arriving in ten minutes, all hands prepare Action Stations.”

The XO looked at Shanree one more time, “I’m needed on the Bridge. If you don’t need anything else?”

Shanree nodded to the man that he was fine and so the officer departed for his duty station. Shanree took several minutes to do one last inventory of his kit and mentally cross some theshes and dot some isks, before determining he was ready. He walked from the ready room to the corridor that connected it to the Vindicator Heavy Cruiser’s hangar bay where his starfighter was parked. The large bubble canopy opened at his approach which allowed him to enter and place his stuff down after gracefully leaping from the deck to the fighter’s wing, and into the cockpit. He sat in the pilot’s seat and allowed it to swivel and move into place before he started hitting buttons and flipping toggles.

He slipped his helmet on and checked the comms in time to hear the general broadcast from the CIC, “One minute to Hyperspace exit.”

“Wee-Gee, what’s our status?” Shanree asked the starfighter’s pilot droid, WE-G1.

A flat monotone voice replied with no delay, “Vessel is Green across the board. Ready for take off.”

“Excellent”, Shanree secured his fastenings and restraints, and settled in for the part he hated most about his job.

Born with no physical eyes Shanree, and other Miraluka, made poor pilots. They could see through the Force which was sufficient in many circumstances, and better than visual sight in many others, but for something like piloting– it just didn’t work. SAG had installed a powerful and quite capable droid directly to the starfighter to do the task of piloting the ship on Shanree’s behalf. The notion somewhat terrified and thrilled him, placing his life into the hands of a circuit-brained droid, but the alternative meant bringing Zakai into the Special Activities Group and that was something the older man wanted to avoid.

“Exiting Hyperspace in 3- 2- 1.” The CIC voice said over the comms net.

Shanree’s stomach dropped slightly as the *Aegis* dropped from the extra-dimension of Hyperspace. The hangar’s blast door slid open without hesitation, the atmospheric force fields already on. SAG 1-337 was a Bes’uliiik-class Starfighter produced by MandalMotors, covered in a thin skin of genuine Beskar, and heavily modified by the Taldryan Army for SAG agents’ use. The fighter leaped off of the deck on its repulsors and made for open space. WE-G1 opened the throttles on the upgraded ion engines once they were clear of the warship and its energy shielding. Shanree made sure his neural link was connected to the ship’s systems so he could monitor everything, paying particular note to the upgraded shield generator’s status as well as the fighter’s various armaments in case things went sideways.

“SAG 1-337, this is *Aegis* Actual. On behalf of the Battlegroup we wish you good luck, and May the Force Be With You– Wait one”, the comms line went silent for a moment.

Shanree’s brow furrowed at the sudden change in Captain Rickards voice at the end of his well-wishes. Before the warship’s commander could get back to him Shanree started feeling the Force swirl around him ominously. His skin prickled and he knew something was about to happen, “Wee-Gee! Bring us about to the same heading as the *Aegis*!”

The black of space was pierced by flashes of light as dozens of vessels dropped out of hyperspace. There was no moment of hesitation before the new ships opened fire on the three Taldryan Vindicator heavy cruisers. WE-G1 put SAG 1-337 into a violent series of evasive maneuvers as laser fire was directed their way. Starfighters began to detach themselves and emerge from various enemy vessels filling the starfighter’s sensors with nearly fifty or more bogies.

Captain Rickards’s voice returned to Shanree’s ear, “Unknown contacts, fifteen enemy corvettes and what appear to be makeshift carriers. They’ve launched fighters– Return to the *Aegis*, Colonel. Your mission is scrubbed.”

Shanree’s could see, through the Force, Taldryan starfighters streaming from the hangars of the three Taldryan Republic warships. TIE Defenders lurched into vacuum and took off at tremendous speed towards the enemy fighters approaching the small battlegroup, “Roger that, *Aegis*. We’re returning to–”

Flashes of laser fire splashed across SAG 1-337’s deflector shields causing minimal damage, but made Shanree aware of a trio of enemy fighters approaching him from ahead and beneath. If WE-G1 turned them back towards the Battlegroup at this point it would open his belly up entirely to fire. The droid did the smart thing and instead turned to place the bogies at a more oblique angle to the ship.

“I recommend you activate the defense turret”, WE-G1 advised Shanree, who agreed by toggling the activation switch.

His seat slid backwards as though it were preparing for him to leave, but instead of popping the canopy and turning ninety-degrees the seat instead turned a full 180 and placed him at the control yoke built into the rear of the cramped compartment. His hands flew over some safeties, activating the dorsal quad turret between its engine nacelles.

"I'm ready, Wee-Gee!" Shanree shouted over his shoulder in excitement.

The droid altered its flight pattern to give the turret its greatest possible field of fire at the approaching fighters who were now below and behind them. Shanree took several deep breaths and focused himself in the Force, expanding his awareness to the region of space around him. He identified where the bogies were and, using the control yoke, began to take aim. He loosed short bursts of quad-lasers at the enemy fighters and splashed hits across the lead's shields almost immediately. The leader broke off, followed by his two wingmen, to find a new approach that didn't expose them to the Bes'uliik's surprise return fire. Operating without a wingman of his own however the advanced MandalMotors superiority fighter was at a severe disadvantage. They needed to get back to the safety of the *Aegis* quickly, but everytime WE-G1 made to adjust course and bring them closer their pursuers maneuvered to prevent it.

"SAG 1-337, hold course", a gruff voice came over the CommsNet.

Wee-Gee, aware of something that Shanree could not sense, did its best to maintain its course while juking to avoid turbolaser fire and starfighter missiles. Shanree studied his sensors, through his link, searching for the source of the voice. Green laser fire lanced up from below catching two of the bogeys unawares, followed shortly thereafter by the silhouettes of two three-winged TIE Defenders. Shanree whooped excitedly at their high speed fly by and highly effective strike.

"Good flying there, boys!" Shanree laughed into his coms, "Can you clear me a way home?"

"Roger. Stick to us", came the gruff voice's reply, "Falcon 3, out."

WE-G1 fell into formation with the two TIE Defenders as the remaining third Headhunter bogey decided the change from 3 on 1 to in its favor to 1 on 3 against him was not in his best interest, and he bugged out. The three Taldryan fighters adjusted course and made for the *Aegis*'s hangar well under its arrowhead-shaped hull. Their approach was cut short when three small corvettes, belonging to the as yet unidentified enemy, began moving towards the *Vindicator* heavy cruiser. *Triumph* and *Dreadhammer* were similarly engaged and unable to mutually support their sister ship.

"Oh frack, they took out the *Aegis*'s port shield dome. We're moving in to support the *Aegis*, can you hang with us SAG 1-337?" Falcon 3's voice asked.

WE-G1 answered on Shanree's behalf, "Negative. This vessel is not equipped to match your performance parameters."

"You two go ahead, we'll handle ourselves." Shanree told the two TIE pilots, "I need a ship to return to. We'll do our own thing."

The two TIE Defenders leapt ahead of the Bes'uliik-class fighter before Falcon 3 had even replied in the affirmative. Shanree's neural link fed him his fighter's sensor data. All around him the battlespace was filled with Taldryan superiority fighters in wing pairs chasing after or engaged with enemy bogeys of nearly a half-dozen varieties. The enemy, as of yet unidentified but certainly belonging to the Human League, had deployed a similar variety of escort ships from which their fighters had sprung. Moving in concert, the enemy corvettes and frigates moved in on the three Taldryan cruisers. The *Aegis* was, as described, now engaging three warships as it attempted to maneuver and maintain formation with its sister ships. To prevent this the enemy was attempting to use a Nebulon-B frigate, accompanied by a Corellian C90 corvette and DP20 Gunship, as a wedge to peel it away from the protective cover fire the Taldryan ships could provide each-other.

His mind raced; they needed to get back to the *Aegis* and land but their approach was still too hot to do so unescorted. SAG 1-337 was an exceptional heavy starfighter in its own right, but he had no wingmate which left him more vulnerable than just about any other craft in the battlespace. He was about to give his droid pilot an order to bring them on a long, arcing path back towards the center of the Taldryan task force's position when he noticed something. A trio of bulk freighters which had jumped into the system along with the rest of the enemy ships had remained to the rear. As he momentarily observed him a chill ran over his skin and pimpled his flesh. His sensor readouts began screaming as it detected numerous launches.

"Oh, frell. WeeGee, get us in front of that!" Shanree's hands flew over his panels and toggles prepping every weapon and trick the Bes'uliik had at its disposal.

Incapable of vocal inflection the Droid Pilot's reply was monotone as ever, but Shanree felt he heard a note of panic anyhow, "That would be unwise. I detect over 400 hundred missiles and torpedoes, this vessel's shields are not rated—"

"Don't read me the warranty! Do it!" Shanree hit the dashboard in frustration, "*Aegis* Actual, this is Colonel Argentin. You've got a swarm of launches coming your way!"

WE-G1 complied without complaint or hesitation.

"Acknowledged, Colonel," came Captain Rickards's reply, though after a moment his voice came back with some concern, "We aren't seeing what you're seeing. They've reduced our sensor capabilities—"

SAG 1-337 accelerated hard pushing Shanree into his restraints as he was still facing aft. The ship juked and pitched violently at times as the Droid Pilot fulfilled his orders in

conjunction with the list of various standing orders he could not easily override— his passenger’s safety, the safety of the vessel, the nominal operating parameters of the fighter’s systems, etc. Shanree fought through the G-Forces to reply to Rickards, “I’m on it.”

The Bes’uliik-class fighter wove in-between streaks of laser fire and corkscrewed away from an anti-starfighter missile that had locked onto them. Shanree did his best to work the quad turret as they wildly spun and turned through the battlespace. Fortunately the fighting lessened as they made their way towards the rear of the enemy’s lines. The freighters had launched their swarm from a considerable distance, which was the only reason they’d been able to make it this far without yet intercepting the cloud of missiles. SAG 1-337’s sensors began painting the individual warheads as they came into range at full throttle towards the cloud.

He concentrated deeply on the Force, trying to pair his neural feed’s sensor readouts with his instincts. Shanree took a deep breath as he gave himself over to a meditative calm. There was a moment of internal silence where the chirp of systems, the klaxon of alarms, and the movement of the fighter all faded into the background. His fingers hovered over his weapon’s panel— waiting. WE-G1 pushed the fighter laterally out of the way of a line of green laser fire. They’d picked up a bogey who was now diving down on them as they approached the incoming missile cloud. SAG 1-337 bounced this way and that, making for a hard target but even so the fighter’s upgraded shields were put to work. Laser impacts on the shields buffeted them but Shanree held his calm.

*Now.*

His hand flew over the weapon’s panel and unleashed the Bes’uliik’s payload. Four blaster cannons in the fighter’s nose roared to life, throwing red bolts of coherent light at the incoming missiles and torpedoes. Eight contrails leapt up and away from concealed weapons bays in the fuselage above and below the wing pylons. Again, and again the weapons bay doors would open and out would emerge a small projectile, that would then launch and streak away from them at tremendous speed. SAG had six of these volleys to give before Shanree was given the bingo ammo warning via his neural link. Their payload spent WE-G1 pulled them into a hard 180 degree turn. Shanree was thrown into his restraints and he struggled to hold the air in his chest for a few seconds until the turn eased-up.

His hands now grasped the control yoke of the rear-facing quad-turret as his head scanned the battlespace around them seeking their bogey’s location. Their rapid turn had broken his pursuit momentarily but the vintage X-Wing, and his Headhunter wingmate that Shanree now saw, was moving back in on them. Shanree lined up his shots and loosed laser fire at their persuers. The Headhunter jukeed out of the way but the slightly less nimble X-wing ate a couple laser bolts on its shields, the last of which broke through and scorched one of the snubfighter’s laser cannons. The X-wing peeled off as Shanree tried to keep showering it until it was out of his firing arc.

“Confirming missile impacts”, WE-G1 called out, “Sensors suggest seventy enemy projectiles destroyed.”

“Frack, that’s not nearly enough”, he gritted his teeth as he continued harassing the Headhunter which desperately wanted to line up a shot on their rear, “Wee-Gee, you need to get me in gun range of those missiles. We’ll pace them from ahead.”

“That would be—” Wee-Gee started to protest.

Shanree hit the dashboard again, “Do it!”

The Force tingled his skin again. Trusting in his instinct he let go of his conscious control of the control yoke at the same time his starfighter rapidly deaccelerated under WE-G1’s evasive maneuvers in compliance with his orders. Still facing backwards the deacceleration buried Shanree in his seat for once which was much more comfortable than the restraint straps that had been doing most of the work so far. The abrupt maneuver by the Droid Pilot put the X-Wing, coming across their rear in a gun run, dead center of his scopes. Without thought Shanree’s fingers squeezed the triggers on the control yoke. Quad Laser fire crashed into the X-wing’s feeble remaining shields and through the cockpit below. The pilot was vaporized before the ship exploded and trailed away like a comet. Wee-Gee’s maneuver had also caught the Headhunter by surprise and he overshot the Bes’uliiik fighter which put him squarely in the sights of their forward lasers. The Headhunter disappeared into a poof of fiery debris that rapidly dispersed into nothing.

Shanree whooped with delight but he could spare no time. Their deacceleration had put SAG 1-337 precariously close to a cloud of nearly 300 anti-ship missiles— exactly as he’d ordered. His fingers again squeezed the triggers on the yoke. The quad laser turret sent bolt after bolt into the cloud. The Force coursed through his veins as he focused in on the projectiles; he could target one and destroy it, counting on its explosion to take a couple or a few more with it. He could shift fire to different quadrants as each explosion cleared a small area around itself of a few more of the deadly weapons which were now entering their terminal phase. Their trajectories were carrying them back into the thick of the fighting, towards the Taldryan Cruisers. Unable to spare a moment’s concentration Shanree could not see that the enemy ship’s had succeeded in wedging themselves between the Taldryan warships and their starfighters had started to leave the area of operation between themselves and the missiles.

He could only fire his weapon. Through his gritted teeth, which was causing his jaw to hurt, he started to growl. It was a guttural noise of effort and frustration that grew in volume and pitch until it was something akin to a scream. Shanree was destroying the missiles by the dozens but there were hundreds of them. For every missile he shot it took four with it, but for every five missiles he disabled there were still hundreds left lurching towards their target. The Taldryan ships were getting close now. They were visible with the naked eye, if Shanree had had any, as small gray wedges in the dark of space that were slowly growing larger and larger. Shanree’s heart began to fill with despair as his efforts proved more and more futile. There were just so many projectiles. As the *Aegis*, *Triumph*, and *Dreadhammer* got closer and closer, WE-G1 reached his decision point and peeled off.

Shanree’s head jerked around over his shoulder, “What the frell are you doing! Get us back there!”

“Negative.” The droid’s monotone reply was authoritative, “This vessel cannot survive an impact with a Heavy Cruiser.”

Shanree couldn’t argue with that so all he could do was watch through the Force as the remaining two-hundred or so missiles and torpedoes, launched by the freighters what seemed an age ago, collided with the three Taldryan warships. *Triumph* and *Dreadhammer* weathered the storm momentarily under their powerful shields but the *Aegis*, who’s shields had already been heavily damaged, immediately erupted in flames. Powerful explosions, deep in the ship’s core, pushed armored panels out. It bulged in several places before the internal explosions tore the warship apart. Its two sister ships withstood most of the onslaught under the protection of their shields, but the assault was such that those soon failed and they two became blossoms of brief, fiery explosions.

“All remaining Taldryan Forces, this is Falcon 3– Make that Falcon Leader now”, a familiar gruff voice came over the comms net, “I’m transmitting coordinates for retreat and rendezvous. Break off in wing pairs and May the Force Be With You.”

The remaining Taldryan starfighters were still engaged with the enemy’s fighters and warships. It would be a struggle for any of them to escape but at this point it was just about everyone for themselves. They were dispersed across the battlespace with superior enemy numbers between them and each-other. Any attempt to come to one-another’s rescue would likely result in more casualties. Shanree’s heart was wrenched, his gut was twisting itself into knots. Though they were still moving at combat speed Shanree felt as though he were drifting through space. He searched his sensor readouts, perhaps there was a nearby Taldryan fighter they could form up with, or come to the rescue of but they were likewise separated from anyone else.

His heart in his boots, Shanree flicked a toggle which returned his seat to a forward facing position, “Wee-Gee, get us out of here.”

“Roger, Colonel.”

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The Ambush at Yspolis was ranked among the Taldryan Navy’s greatest disasters. The loss of three valuable Vindicator Heavy Cruisers and countless TIE Defenders was a wound that the Taldryan Navy could cover, but one that never did quite heal. The Republic and its Navy would struggle against the Rayterian Human League, who soon after the Ambush declared their responsibility for the attack, as well as declaring war upon their Taldryan neighbors.