

Annual Journal: 35ABY
Confidential Contents: Mauro Wynter

Month 1-2

The bridge of the *Retribution* was silent as I sat and waited. The black, bleakness of space surrounded the VT-49 Decimator as it circled idly around the emerald green planet below. The distress call should have long ago been answered. The fact that my ship was able to stay in orbit after colliding with an asteroid field was a small miracle. The concussive trauma the impact had placed on me was not.

The navigational computer was faulty, that I knew. Nothing moves as slowly as time when it is the only constant companion to a lone pilot lost in the endlessness and of space. I wish I had a cache of holovids stored to pass the time. My fuel reserves were steady, however, and I considered how long he may be out in space.

The decision to land a vessel is never easy in uncharted territory. Scanning the topography and looking for electromagnetic pulses turned up nothing of value for me. I decided to put the craft down at the peak of a plateau in a hilly continent on the northern hemisphere. The planet looked to contain a breathable atmosphere and had some traces of water. I keyed in a few dials at the helm and manually began the descent.

Entering atmosphere the approaching sky took me by surprise. I was confronted with a vibrant gold and deep purple. I considered myself content for a second to not maroon others with me and then cursed my isolation as the craft made landfall.

Daytime was easier for me. The beautiful purple and golden sky cheered me in this solitude. Nighttime was more problematic. Not even the low humming and guttural noises made by the native reptiles and small mammals put me at ease. I had found no apex predators, to be sure, but had found no sentient life to help me find my way.

The silence and loneliness was not helped by the dull palatability of the reptiles and rodents I was able to catch and cook readily. Mostly though, I sat and waited.

The distress signal was ever present, tapping a long low frequency barely audible within the bridge of the VT-49. A single red diode flashed ceaselessly, as if faintly beating away the resignation that I was slowly finding myself in. I often sat in the commander's seat on the bridge and tried to remember faces of people.

And yet, as things often do, when I found myself adjusting to this new life fate interceded as a cruel mistress. I did not hear the call at first, deep in meditation. Yet, the high pitched note refused to be ignored. I slowly moved to his communications array and flickered on the incoming message. I simply sat and waited. I was going home.

Month 3

I sat at the smoke filled cantina leisurely pushing my drink from hand to hand. It has been a long time coming, wallowing at the Tether. The events of the recent war had taken a drastic toll on me. I had been fighting for so long, and had much to think about. First, I crash landed on Nancora. The first night back I had sat at this same cantina seat and talked to my friends Len lode and Maximus Alvinus. I had been busy since then.

I continued to sit and drink. I needed this release, after many weeks of hard training and the crushing weight of leadership. And so I drank, and smoked, and sat for a long time. It was late in the evening, or perhaps early in the morning, I did not recall when the man walked in. He sat down across the cantina from me, saddling up to the cantina and ordering a drink.

The barmaid brought a frothy mug and filled it with dark brown ale. When she left, I took a deep hard look at the man sitting across from me. He had a look that was far too familiar and yet oddly out of place. The short, brown hair with a slight golden hue. The bronzed skin, with a fair complexion that was blemish free. The hazel eyes and the ever present smirk. I paused for a while, trying to get my mind to think through the haze of alcohol.

I continued to study the man, watching his mannerisms. The man appeared to be roughly early thirties and of a stocky but athletic build. Even his sense of style made me feel a wince of nostalgia. A black body fitting top with sturdy leather shoulder holsters. Leather boots, belt, and gloves with a dark heavy duty pair of trousers. I realized through the fog that he was looking at myself.

I stumbled over to the other side of the bar in an attempt to approach the man. "Excuse me...are you me?" The man turned to me, and laughed loudly. "My friend, how much have you been drinking this evening? Haven't you heard of a holoshroud?" I sat down in the seat next to the man and bought several more rounds.

Months 4-6

The Havoc's Tether was packed to the brim with unruly, boisterous patrons. Not a single table or barstool in the dimly lit cantina remained empty. Returning soldiers, pilots, mechanics, and mercenaries drank and caroused to celebrate the recent victory against the forces of the Collective. Many drank to dull the pain of losing comrades and to forget the horrors of battle. Others chased their vices with wild abandon to escape the memory of the closing of the last war. That was a different time. That was a different place.

I sat with Len lode and Maximus Alvinus and asked a simple question, "Why are we alive when so many better men are dead?" Director Maximus Alvinus and Executor Len lode looked up from wherever their minds had wandered to. They returned to the exhaustive work of staring at their glasses and pondered.

Standing at attention did not come easily to me these days. Once I had been a fanatic Imperialist with Clan Scholae Palatinae. I recalled that the Director seated in front of me had often stood by my side in those days following orders mercilessly and efficiently. New Tython had changed that. Satele Shan's Director and Executor were somberly reviewing the Odan-Urr's casualty lists. Even in victory, the butcher's bill had come due at a steep price. I remembered the Harakoans of New Tython. I recalled an ancient civilization eradicated due to hatred. Len signaled for me to stand at ease, a lifetime of military bearing and etiquette radiating off of his blue skin.

BOOM. As if on cue, the holo projector built into the Director's desk began playing newsreels of events none of them could ever possibly forget. New Tython. The death of a planet. The genocide of a people. The shattering of a dream. I shook, startled from the trauma freshly awakening in my shattered psyche. Maximus reached across the table and steadied me. A look of compassion and understanding was shared. The Director held me by my shoulders and locked gaze.

Maximus was now the one shaken, if only ever so slightly. He regained his composure. "You are to recruit an internal security force with the authority to investigate any and all members of our resistance, rooting out corruption as you find it and thwarting it from planting a seed. Furthermore, to provide the ability to launch such operations we will secretly provide you with military assets. You are to become an independent arm of the defense of the Kias System. This is not a request, Commander Wynter, it is an order." And with that I was given command of Tython Squadron

The task of clearing out the offices previously inhabited by Garza's Pathfinders gave me no pleasure, despite the recent promotion. Pathfinders had a storied tradition, and had sacrificed much in the service of Odan-Urr. I hoped my erstwhile internal security force would live up to such a legacy. Different times. Different people. Director Alvinus' pledge to secretly provide assets was more literal than I might have envisioned. I was given no support staff and only granted access to the Cloister. The question of where to begin organizing a secret police force eluded me for many hours.

I was jarred back to my senses as the doorway of the Control Cloister opened, allowing a petite, porcelain skinned Zabrak woman to enter. I looked up from the console I was brooding over, puzzled by the apparition defiantly sauntering towards him. Her vestigial horns were shorn close to her scalp, covered by her wildly flowing platinum hair. She might have been mistaken for one of those angels Deep Core explorers often fabled if not for the crisp uniform she wore bearing the insignia of the O.E.F. Navy.

The woman stood firmly at attention in front of him and rendered a crisp salute. He rose and returned the salute as best he could. "Major Silvia Tanos, Intelligence Officer, Remembrance of Seher, reporting for duty as by orders of Director Alvinus," she declared smartly. A slight tone of disdain registering in her voice. She glared at me as she waited to be put at ease.

I motioned for her to be seated as she set down a stack of dossier files. It appeared her orders included not to leave a digital footprint. The Zabrak sat emotionless, staring at me. The thought occurred to me that Alvinus providing me with an Intelligence Officer may have been a mocking gesture. No, it must be a clue. I counted the number of dossiers. Eleven, including Tanos' own. I ordered her to assemble the personnel listed in her dossiers secretly the next morning.

Several lights flickered in the cavernous hanger bay as a faulty klaxon hummed defiantly in the distance. I sat idly, waiting for Major Silvia Tanos to arrive. My desk was a drab metal alloy, shabbily constructed and showing years of abuse. So too were the four benches arranged nearby.

The Zabrak arrived punctually, as expected. Saluting crisply, she took a seat on the bench in front of me. She eyed the large crates laid out symmetrically along the length of the hanger bay. I directed her, pointing towards a display board. Twelve spots were clearly defined. A squadron. We took turns going over the roster, all the pieces falling into place. In truth, we had a remarkably skilled group of individuals in our midst.

I picked up two crowbars hidden below my desk, handing one to the Zabrak. We walked over to the nearest crate and began dismantling the planking. When finished, Tanos stepped back with a startled gasp. "You have got to be joking!" she exclaimed. We worked feverously into the night, breaking down the crates of the makeshift training squadron.

The curious sight of Quadjumpers preparing for launch was made ever more absurd by the ramshackle podium set between them. Major Tanos and I had spent the entirety of the morning performing pre-flight diagnostics. The recruits reported in punctually. They were composed of a smattering of races. An alabaster toned Twi'Lek. A grey skinned Pau'an. A blue skinned Togruta. A pair of Miraluki. The group were halted by Major Tanos, who ordered them to be seated as I clambered up the podium.

I scanned the faces of these veteran pilots. I thought of New Tython. The silence lingered for an eternity as I gathered my thoughts. The speech was rousing, in my mind at least. Low cheers rang out from some of the recruits, while others nodded with approval. Major Tanos called for silence as I then read out squadron positions. The hanger blast doors retracted. The energized field holding the artificial environment of the orbital platform strained as pressure stabilized. All pilots were ready for tasking.

Months 7-9

The harsh darkness far above the pastoral landscape of Daleem was a lonely and somber place. The beautiful, vibrant, and well-preserved Vitali stronghold was a bastion of justice and tranquility within an ever more dangerous and complex sector of space. Most who

glimpse the world from this vantage are either longing to make landfall or suppressing the bitterness of leaving such a paradise.

Not so for Tython Squadron. The darkness was a blessing. The darkness meant they had purpose and more importantly time. The absence of burning cities below or of silent debris in the vacuum of space was a welcomed reminder of what normalcy could and should be for these wayward veterans.

Three tiny formations, miniscule against the backdrop of lumbering freighters and passenger liners scurrying about the system, flew with the hunger of men and women looking to satiate an itch. They were getting better. They were becoming good.

The tight line formation became a staggered diagonal in seconds, deftly avoiding the cluster of asteroids before rapidly reforming up and increasing velocity. Six more vessels followed in suit, executing the same maneuver.

The squadron did as they were told, and took up position in a tightly coordinated dance of maneuvers and jockeying of position. Upon entering their designated zone the squadron Tactical Officer began scanning down the area, ready for the simulation about to be thrown their way. Incoming messages from Daleem alerted them of their simulation. Massive holo projector feeds came to life in the distance, illuminating a hulking, ghostly apparition of a Victory-II class Star Destroyer.

The Victory-II opened up with its turbo-laser batteries, lancing ephemeral lights beyond the squadron and into the blackness of space. Behind them, another holoprojection crackled to life, in the guise of a Nebulon-B frigate. Instinctually the flight leader's issues orders to form up and prepare to engage the incoming projections of TIE fighters. The battle had begun.

I sat next to Major Silvia Tanos and the newest members of Tython Squadron. We were busy studying the displays in front of us, monitoring the progress of the simulation above Daleem. I punched in a few commands on the display, and the training craft changed to the visage of B-wing Starfighters.

The monitors registered several TIEs being slagged by the multitude of lasers firing from the frigate. The nimble Imperial craft scored several hits on the Nebulon-B's poorly shielded central axis, attempting to sever the vessel in two. Yet, many flickered out of existence as the laser batteries scored crippling hits. The B-wings closed into attack formation on the Vic-II, launching their payloads of proton torpedoes.

The diagnostic displays recorded each hit. The proton torpedoes had caused moderate damage to several of the weapons platforms on the massive vessel, allowing the fighters to get in closer and target vital systems.

We all watched as the Nebulon-B maneuvered below the enemy ship and prepare to jump to light speed, its path no longer blocked and receiving little direct fire. Tanos and Bitshiver gave a small round of applause as Tython Squadron formed up and followed the Nebulon-B's lead. Ranarr Kul-Tarentae nodded in approval. I rapidly keyed in a sequence of codes. A new holoprojector flickered to life.

The squadron was deeply tired. They had lived in their cockpits for weeks. Early novelty and excitement had died off after repeated simulations of no-win scenarios and numerous missions that ended in nothingness.

They had patrolled the commercial lanes entering and exiting the system. They had ran convoy duty for passenger liners between Daleem and Kiast. They had scrambled for sorties against merchants to check their cargos and passenger logs. Mainly, though, nothingness and boredom to stunt the nerves of the pilots.

The twelve Quadjumpers fanned out by flight, looking for anything in the vast bleakness of space. Their quandary was answered by the massive glow of engine fire burning to life in the distance. The hulk of a modified Gozanti-class cruiser lumbered forward, engines bleeding red to blue in preparation to jump.

Alpha Flight did as ordered, blasting by the helm of the C-Roc, forcing her to adjust her heading ever so slightly and reducing her speed. The two remaining flights formed up in precision-infiltration formation, nearly touching two abreast and three deep. What ensued was some of the finest tactical piloting I ever witnessed.

Major Tanos and I ran to Tython Squadron's hanger, barely outpacing a tactical team of security forces. The radio transmissions were odd to say the least. We entered the hanger to see the massive frame of a C-Roc cruiser barely clearing the ceiling and the Quadjumpers parked neatly against the bulkhead. The pilots stood in ranks, beaming ear to ear.

Tanos and I followed the security team to inspect the C-Roc's cargo hold. Minutes later, we came back out, stunned. I ordered Tanos to lock down the hanger and arrange a meeting with Len Iode and Maximus Alvinus.

Director Maximus Alvinus and Executor Len Iode sat incredulously at the small, ornate, cedarwood conference table. Major Tanos and I had spent the remainder of the afternoon and early evening using the Central Cloister's advanced computers and data analysis capabilities to track and modulate the coded transmissions from *Raxanna's Remorse*. The

impounded C-Roc cruiser had slipped into the Kias System from an unknown vector and had remained hidden for some time transmitting coded missives.

Major Tanos to explain the specifics. The vessel was crewed by a skeleton team of advanced droids and slaver circuits. The only information we could as yet glean from the droid brain navigation was that Arx was a preprogrammed destination.

I asked for fighter support to better protect Daleem and the Kias System. Executor Len scowled at me. Director Alvinus belied none of the same thinking, and sent a smile to his Chiss counterpart. Major Tanos placed a docket on the desk, pushing it towards the Executor and Director, indicating the pilot's training records. Alvinus read the dispatches and nodded approvingly. We received our Tie Defenders and were on the fast track to commissioning.

Month 10

The silence on the bridge of the *Retribution* was deafening for us. The makeshift assemblage was as makeshift as the mission itself. *Perhaps this indeed was a trap*, I thought.

From the moment the transmission came in from Plagueis territory opinions were divided. Normally, Plagueis was an erstwhile supporter of the Iron Throne against the Resistance. Why, now, would they send an intermediary offering assistance? The timing felt too perfect and the intentions too plain. With victory in the recent war with the Collective, Odan-Urr had gained much. Trust and knowing one's enemies from allies was not one advantage, however. And so I was on my personal vessel, without orders or authorization, with a handful of my squadron.

I had brought Zeline, Ranarr, and Tyraal because they were Jedi. And so Zeline and Tyraal sat inside the laser cannon mounts on the ventral and dorsal sides of the vessel as Ranarr sat with Major Tanos and I at the helm. The *Retribution's* stealth mode was activated, forcing her to sit helpless against the silhouette of the Star Destroyer. We waited for the right moment, for the right transport. Fighter escorts were very minimal here at the heart of the Iron Throne, with a fleet of capital ships creating a cordon around the planets of the system.

Major Tanos barked an order for Tyraal and Zeline to be ready on their laser cannons and to call out a target of the two TIE fighters that leisurely followed the shuttle. I armed the torpedo launches as Tanos primed the engine and donned her helmet. The hatchway opened less than a foot, and cabin pressure and oxygen began to bleed from the cockpit.

The *Retribution* shot onward, her superior speed impressively on display. I breathed heavily as I saw the first few flights of intercept fighters launching from the support vessels. Within an instant two concussion missiles launched from the VT-49. The deadly birds of prey easily detonated on impact with the shuttle, shredding debris languidly expanding outward. What the shockwave did not destroy, the laser fire from the two young Jedi did.

On queue, the ramp closed shut as a small container was pulled inside by clever use of the Force. Major Tanos feverishly handled the vessel as it approached hyperspace.. In an instant, their vision was warped by the dazzling white and blues of the lightspeed jump.

Month 11

Major Silvia Tanos and I were busy studying the displays in front of us, monitoring the progress of the simulation above Daleem. We had made a silent pact to not celebrate Life Day, as the memory of the destruction of New Tython was too bitter. However, we had both lost people dear to us during the previous year.

“Look, I sort of got you a little token of my appreciation.” I said to her, reaching under the desk and removing a box. I handed the box to her slowly, signifying the somber nature of the gift. She opened it carefully, removing the wrapping paper and bow. Her nimble fingers lifted the cover from a small wooden box, revealing a silver necklace with several charms dangling off from it. She smiled slightly, then from ear to ear.

Major Tanos tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to look at her as she fumbled for words. She kept her gaze on me as she slowly reached inside her officer’s tunic. She finished pulling out a tiny metallic box. I took the box from her and thumbed the opening lever. The top sprung open to reveal a signet ring made from platinum. The signet was in the image of a planet, a swirl of shifting greens and blues.

Month 12

The blinding snowstorm burned my eyes, the vision distorted by the sheets of whipping snowflakes blasting by. The frozen tundra offered no shelter or breakage from the winds that buffeted me and sent the drifts of snow up against the path. The midnight sun provided no warmth and only added to his bewilderment. Snow, such an unusual thing, had drawn me Here.

I walked for what seemed like ages, but by looking back at my footprints I knew it was only a kilometer at best. And so I walked, and walked, and walked. It must be a mirage, I thought. A small, humanoid was visible slightly in the distance. I could not wish the vision away. A green and white knit stocking cap. Long, curling shoes with bells on them. “Welcome to the North Pole!” the creature stated. He was indeed real.

I continued to slog through the snow until I was face to face with the diminutive human-like being. The tiny one giggled to himself slightly. "The village is down this hill. My name is Balthezar!" I put away his blaster and shook Balthezar's hand. We walked slowly down the hill, I was freezing and was not in a friendly mood. Still, the jovial nature of the elf was infectious. In the distance, smoke could be seen billowing out of a chimney.

The closer we came more silhouettes of chimneys could be seen, and a cavalcade of lights and sounds were carried on the wind. Upon entering the village's center, I was awestruck. Hundreds of elves were busy scurrying about. Balthezar picked up on my confusion. "Say, you aren't from here are you friend?" The giggling continued.

I was led to a very large and welcoming looking building. Brick and mortar, but painted in the same red and green of the village itself. We entered through a wide doorway. Odd odors were pungently filling Mauro's nostrils. "You haven't seen reindeer before? Where are you from?" asked Balthezar. I was given a wooden chair and warmed myself by a nearby fireplace. Balthezar and another elf came forward with a large mug of brown liquids. We passed the night drinking the warm sugary concoction.

It was nearly midnight when a team of elves entered. "Mr. Wynter, we can work magic here. Your funny sleigh is fixed and ready to go whenever you are." The elves pushed my landing craft forward from behind the building. Balthezar and I shook hands and parted ways with a laugh and a smile.

END OF JOURNAL - Resolutions for 36 ABY

35 ABY has been an incredible, challenging, and rewarding year. The people I have met, the challenges I have faced, and the responsibility I have taken on has been remarkable. My goals are to continue leading Tython Squadron while also reaching for more accolades and challenging missions. The future is indeed bright.