

Code: Dread Multi-Objective Fiction

Objective 2

Unknown Regions

Bridge of the *Silent Scream*

37 ABY

When Knight Khryso Mallus had first been assigned to command the *Silent Scream*, the message had been sudden and unexpected. The Chiss hadn't had much time to prepare for taking control of the Combat Hammerhead Corvette. Much time had passed since then, however, and while the ship hadn't spent very long at port, Khryso had taken full advantage of its downtime.

The captain's chair had been reupholstered with fresh, new materials. The bridge had been scrubbed clean to a shine and repainted and he'd even had a smaller co-captain's chair installed for Captain Ohli. He'd also taken the time to add a pair of serving droids to the crew to bring any drinks or appetizers from the new conservator he'd installed. It was all a far cry from the proper changes and updates he'd like to make, but it was what Khryso had managed in the time available to him.

The Sith sat in the captain's chair, his mouth closed tightly and his arms folded across his chest. The modest crew of the *Silent Scream* worked around him, silent and focused on the task at hand as instrumental operatic music could be heard faintly in the background. They were on the hunt, having pinpointed the location of a collection of Collective and former Severian Principate agents that were gathering near the Aliso system. Their commander hadn't backed down when given the offer, so Khryso was glad to oblige her wish for death.

The *Silent Scream* was now en route, along with the rest of Task Force Besh, to confront the heart of the enemy fleet. Although the hostile force was scattered throughout the local area of the Unknown Regions, the strongest of their forces were gathered around the commander. From what Khryso had been able to determine from the Anchorage's initial scans, Task Force Besh should bring enough firepower to decimate the target. With whatever back-up they received from the Clan at large, the Chiss couldn't see the campaign lasting for much longer than a few hours.

"We're approaching our destination, m'lord." the navigator reported from their station, turning their head only slightly to regard the rigidly upright Sith. Khryso unfolded his arms, allowing them to rest gently on the armrests as he glanced up towards Captain Ohli as she moved to his side.

"As soon as we're out of hyperspace, I want our full suite of sensors focused on pinpointing every enemy craft. We'll be taking an aggressive point position to cover the rest of the Task

Force as it arrives.” Ohli nodded as she received Khryso’s orders, quickly relaying the appropriate tasks to the bridge crew. Khryso could feel the mounting tension as a small countdown appeared in the corner of the main viewscreen, indicating the time left until the return to realspace. The Sith allowed his zeal to feed into his confidence as he waited, reaching into the Force to try and glean whatever information he could about the enemy’s formation. The Collective knew they were coming, so they would likely be prepared. Would they have formed up appropriately, or will their sloppy positioning betray the thrown-together nature of their fleet?

The stars and the void they sat in suddenly became visible again, slowing to a relative stop as the *Silent Scream* exited Hyperspace. Information from the scanners began to scroll across the bottom of the ship’s viewscreen as the corvette’s computers quickly began to highlight enemy numbers and locations. From the distance they were at, any fighters or freighters would be nearly invisible. Anything larger than that, however, was visible to the eye on the viewscreen. Khryso had, unfortunately, been unable to predict their exact formation. It didn’t matter, though. A handful of corvettes and frigates, with less than a hundred fighters. Task Force Besh could handle this.

“Pinpoint their flagship,” Khryso said as the *Silent Scream*’s sensors continued to locate and highlight the various fighter squadrons that were already forming up into attack positions. Khryso reached out with the Force, trying to gauge the disposition of the enemy. They were still too far for him to gain any proper feeling beyond a general sense of aggression that usually accompanied soldiers.

The ships of Task Force Besh began dropping out of hyperspace just behind the *Silent Scream*, quickly establishing a network of communication among them and sliding into an assault formation. The *Silent Scream* pushed forward, ready to intercept any fighters that might feel brave enough to attack the Ascendant Fleet while it got its bearings.

“They’re beginning to reform,” a crewmember reported as the enemy ships began to move. Khryso nodded, narrowing his eyes as he studied the viewscreen in an attempt to anticipate their movements. They must have decided to change strategies once they actually laid eyes on Task Force Besh.

“We’re going in,” the Chiss decided, glancing towards Ohli, “make sure the rest of the fleet is backing us up.” He didn’t want to give the enemy a chance to prepare any further. They’d had their time to do that before Plagueis arrived. Now it was too late.

“We’re cleared to engage,” the comms officer reported, giving a thumbs-up without turning away from their console. The helmsman engaged the *Silent Scream*’s engine and the corvette began to cut forward through the void of space.

“Have you uncovered their flagship?” Khryso spoke to no-one in particular, but was answered nonetheless.

“I believe I’ve isolated the comm signature that matches the one we connected to on the Anchorage.”

“Focus our turbolasers towards it. Create a death field with our laser turrets for the incoming fighters.” As Khryso spoke, the *Silent Scream*’s computer updated the viewscreen’s HUD so that the suspected flagship was marked. Streaks of light began to pass through the vacuum between the two fleets. The distance between them was still too great for any notable hits to be made, but with the plasma now being exchanged between vessels, the battle was officially underway.

Despite the spread of laser fire now in their path, squadrons of fighters began their attack, flying towards the approaching Ascendant Fleet. A few of the larger ships in the enemy fleet began to break off to support their fighters while the others began to once again shift positions, seeking out what formation they could muster for the incoming threat.

As readouts on their enemy began to scroll across Khryso’s computer, it became clear that the hostile fighters were not entirely Collective in origin. A few of the squadrons that were assaulting them now were indeed Severian Principate vessels. Leftovers of the mutineers from the conflict in the Lyra-3k-a system. They likely had nowhere else to go after turning against their former allies and attacking the Brotherhood. Why they would join up with the Collective in that case is something Khryso didn’t want to waste his time pondering.

Even as fighters began to fall to the *Silent Scream*’s laser turrets, uselessly peppering the corvette’s shields with occasional sprays of blaster fire, the enemy attack didn’t let up. They pushed through the initial screen of lasers and began to swarm the *Silent Scream*, some even pushing through to harass the fleet that was close behind. Those that broke through, however, were shortly met with squadrons of T-70 X-wings being dropped out of the *Formidable*.

Implacable also let loose its fighter squadrons, Warhawk Squadron in particular breaking off to assist the *Silent Scream* in scattering the enemy fighters that were swarming it. “*Silent Scream*, this is Warhawk Leader, we’re here to keep your back clear.”

“Appreciated, Warhawk. We’ll be entering combat range with enemy corvettes soon, so watch yourselves.” Khryso, having been monitoring the battle thus far in silence, stood up from his chair. The rush of being in the midst of combat was beginning to get his blood pumping. In the previous conflict with the Collective, he’d spent much of the battle bolstering his crew through battle meditation. This time, however, he intended to more actively participate in the command of his ship.

One of the enemy corvettes that had joined the starfighter attack wave was now approaching the *Silent Scream* while the other two had angled themselves to attempt to intercept the rest of Task Force Besh. It was clearly just an attempt to slow their advance down while the core of the

enemy's forces regrouped and devised their strategy. "Turn our turbolasers onto the nearest corvette, designation Alpha. Designate the other two vessels Beta and Gamma." As the ships were marked, Khryso reached over to his console and tapped a button. "Warhawk, we're engaging with the closest Corvette, watch yourself."

"Roger that, *Scream*. We've taken a few hits, but your pest problem is almost dealt with."

"Excellent." Khryso turned back to his bridge crew. "How are our shields holding?"

"They're feeling the strain, but still holding up." The *Silent Scream* wasn't the most durable ship in the fleet, but it was holding up well enough considering the extremely straight-forward assault Khryso had attempted. However, after duking it out with target Alpha they may have to fall back and let the *Dominant* or *Brigand* take point. Once the enemy had their formation ready, they'd need to bring the bigger firepower to bear.

The *Silent Scream* and Alpha began trading turbolaser fire, their shields lighting up as the energy from each shot was absorbed. Warhawk Squadron and the fighters they were taking on were forced to spread out and back away from the turbolaser exchange to avoid getting caught in the crossfire, which made the *Scream's* laser turrets a bit less effective at backing up Warhawk.

"Meteor Squadron coming in, making an attack run."

As soon as the message came through, an estimated attack vector was plotted and displayed on the viewscreen. "Refocus turbolaser fire towards Alpha's stern." A brief pause in the deluge of turbolaser fire from the *Scream* commenced as the cannons realigned themselves to clear up the attack vector for Meteor Squadron. Mere moments after turbolaser fire resumed, the X-wing's shot past the corvette and towards their target, seeking out weaknesses as they sprayed the enemy vessel with lasers.

With the *Scream* focused on Alpha by itself, Beta and Gamma were forced to face down the rest of Task Force Besh with only fighter support. In a matter of minutes, both Beta and Gamma were fleeing in the wake of the combined firepower of the Ascendant Fleet, trying to save themselves. They'd delayed Plagueis as long as they could muster and wanted to regroup with their fleet. The Clan, however, had no intention to provide them mercy. They continued to pound the Collective ships with turbolaser fire, eating away at their shields until the hulls were vulnerable. With one final burst, the *Dominant* split Gamma apart and continued its surge forward towards the enemy fleet.

With Task Force Besh continuing to push forward and removing Gamma from the fight, they were able to lead increasingly more support to the *Silent Scream*. The *Formidable* and *Perdition* arrived on either side of the *Scream*, forcing Alpha to fall into a retreat. Meteor Squadron and *Formidable* didn't let up, chasing Alpha down as it turned to leave. Meanwhile,

Perdition assisted the *Scream* and Warhawk Squadron in clearing out the last of the enemy fighters.

Khryso nodded triumphantly, his hands clasped behind his back, as Beta was morphed into super-heated space debris. “Fall into position behind the *Dominant*,” Khryso’s eyes looked over the shoulders of the bridge crew, taking account of the *Scream*’s condition. “While our shield’s recharge we’ll be playing defense.”

“Task Force Besh, this is *Eviscerater*. I’m here with some back-up from Aliso.”

“You’re just in time,” Khryso responded, allowing the corner of his mouth to tug upward slightly as he pressed his lips together. Together with Task Force Besh and his fellow Plagueians, Khryso Mallus launched into war with the Collective once again.