

\*So many times have I heard that war is a game. Be it from Captains on the ground or Commanders in the air. Far too often in fact, that almost all of the ones I have known that follow this belief are dead. Only the lucky survive.

War itself is not a game. It is a tournament. Decided by the battles that compose it, each of which is its own individual game. The winners of which advance closer to the finals in which only one remains.

Those battles can begin in many ways...as can the tournament itself. In the case of today, a new tournament has begun. And we are in the losing position of the first game.

Survival at this stage has become paramount, and extracting our people from Kasiya takes precedence over all else. Regardless of what happens, we can not fail.\*

"We have confirmed trajectory angles from the station, Captain." the sensor officer called out to a white and black Ewok in a gray imperial uniform directly above her. He gave her a soft nod as he turned to another officer adjacent to her.

"And the Karufr's Dervish?" the Ewok Captain asked the officer, who gave him a firm nod in confirmation. "Good, confirm all vessels of the line have their exact coordinates locked."

"Confirmed, Captain," The fleet communications officer called from the left section of the communications array. "All ships of the line confirm coordinates."

The Ewok Captain turned and looked at the command module that sat from the ceiling directly at the opening between the pits, a custom redesign recently completed. Consisting of three seats, in the middle sat the Taldryan Proconsul and Naval Grand Admiral Teebu Nyrrire. His paws were interlaced, his jaw resting upon them. "The Fifth and Seventh Fleets confirm ready, sir."

Teebu lowered his arms and placed them upon the armrests as the Captain took his seat to the right of him. "Set condition one throughout the battle group, prepare to exit lightspeed on timer mark. Initiate operation Yub-Nub."

As soon as the order was given, the lights of the Axios' bridge went dark and ambient blue lighting lit up around the bridge. A timer appeared on a tactical window above Teebu's seat, with seventeen seconds remaining.

As the timer counted down below ten, it turned red with a beep sound at every second. As it hit five seconds, the communications officer turned and looked at Teebu. "Orthanc actual confirms electro-magnetic pulse is successful."

With a smile, he pointed ahead as the hyperspace lines came to a close and directly in front of

them was the top of an Ascension-class Star Destroyer. "Launch all squadrons, begin bombing and missile runs of shield generators and reactors."

The sensor grid lit up as the ships of both the Fifth and Seventh Fleets exited hyperspace, each paired up with a ship of greater strength. The Axios began firing upon the bridge section of the Ascension-class ship with its Kyber-powered turbolasers, with the Orthanc assisting with concentrated firepower on the same location while the Antioch and Karufr's Dervish sat parallel to the top and bottom respectively of one of the two Mark-I Imperial Star Destroyer. The Karufr's Dervish unleashed its port turbolasers onto its reactor section, while the Antioch fired upon the twin shield generators. Within less than 30 seconds, two of the strongest ships of the enemy fleet were rendered helpless

"Enemy flagship is adrift, bombing and missile runs to commence against the last Mark-I destroyer in twenty-three seconds, sir." the tactical officer called out. Suddenly, each of the remaining ships began to come back online one after another and begin to open fire on the battle group.

The upside to this strategy, is it usually gives them several minutes to drop in and decimate an enemy force. The downside is, if they fail to do so in that allotted time they were just as much of a sitting quoniam due to the positioning of the enemy around them. They still should have had another two minutes.

"Shift the Antoch towards Victory destroyer alpha with the Karufrs Dawn and Orthanc to assist. Have the Dervish move on destroyer bravo with the Starhunter and Ironside. Indomitable is to take on the Gladiator-class." Teebu said calmly. The bridge crew did not respond to his order, but instead used that brief additional time in communicating those orders.

It was barely another two minutes before the backbone of the enemy fleet had been broken and the last of the ships jumped away. While the crew of the Axios began to celebrate, Teebu was quick to caution them. While the battle may be done for now, it was far from over. There was no doubt that this was not the full strength of what the enemy had to bear.

"Sir, Consul Wight on the line." the communications officer called back to him. Teebu nodded as he typed several keys on his command console and the image of Wight appeared.

"Consul." Teebu said respectfully, his head bowed forward.

"Impeccable timing." Appius responded. "We've secured most of the artifacts and detonated the passages to the remainder we can not get to in time. Expect us to be off the surface in twenty minutes not a minute later, civilian craft are enroute now."

"Understood. I am sending all available shuttles to the city center to assist with the evacuation. We will hold position here until the all-clear is given." Teebu replied while looking back at the field in front of them. Numerous ships began exiting hyperspace just on the far side of Perune,

barely in visibility range of the fleet. At their lead was an Onager-class Destroyer, flanked by two Mark-I and Mark-II Destroyers. "We will do what we can up here."

"Understood. Good luck, Grand Admiral." Appius said as the communications channel was closed.

The Captain's mouth fell open as additional destroyers began jumping in one after another after another. Lastly, a massive vertical-designed ship that neither of them had ever seen jumped in as well behind the massive enemy fleet.

"Sir, ships of the line are requesting orders." the communications officer relayed as most of the pit officers also looked up at him wondering the same.

With a look of determination and resolve, he stood in his chair and looked straight at the enemy fleet as they started their approach, only a dozen or so minutes until the battle would resume. "Inform all ships to send every shuttle they have to the surface, initiate pattern executor. Victory condition is twenty minutes, after which rendezvous at location E."

The crew turned and went back to their posts. The Captain looked over at Teebu with a concerned expression on his face. "Do you think we can win, sir?"

"No." Teebu said solemnly. "An Onager-class alone with a support fleet yes, but with just one Mark-II in addition we are already evenly matched. Two of them however..all we can do is just hold this point."

Ships began flying through the atmosphere of Kasiya, jumping into hyperspace one after the other as the ships of the battle group reassembled themselves into a large X shaped grid. Between each section the various squadrons were holding steady as the enemy fleet approached. First, came the fighters to which the battle group's own fighters responded in kind.

"Weapons free." Teebu said as he threw his arm forward. The various ships began firing ahead of them around the fighters as the battle itself started to begin. The furthest shots began reaching the shields of the approaching fleet, to which they began opening fire back as well and continued to close the distance.

The vertical-shaped destroyer began to move past the other ships and entered the fray itself, with the turbolaser fire just dissipating off of its shields. It opened fire on the Orthanc with purple-colored turbolaser fire, and without warning it went up in a massive explosion which caught the entire bridge crew including Teebu off guard.

"What the!?" The Captain called out as he leapt from his chair and raced to the viewport window. "But-but how?"

It continued to open fire, and one after another various ships began to be decimated as if their

shields didn't even exist. The Indomitable, the Vengeance, the Revolution, the Left and Right Hands of Destruction, and finally the Antioch. All taken down.

"Full retreat!" The Captain yelled out as he turned towards the pits. "Order a full retreat, no-"

"Belay that order." Teebu interjected. "Order the fleet to spread out, pattern M. The shots are slow and timed, if the ships are able to keep moving they can avoid the attacks."

"No. We can't possibly defend against that." the Captain pleaded as he stood directly before Teebu. "We have to retreat if we want any chance of coming back at this."

"Give the order," Teebu said sharply as he looked down at the Captain. "Or are you refusing my orders, Executive Officer Warrick?"

As the Argent became the vessel's latest victim, Warrick stood at attention. "I respectfully cannot carry out your orders, si-"

He was unable to finish his words, as a single blaster shot rang out from Teebu's side and straight into Warrick's skull. As the Ewok dropped, Teebu looked into the pit. The communications officer nodded, and issued the orders.

The battle continued to rage on, but with additional ships falling at a slower pace. Finally it ceased firing as the remainder of the fleet began moving up to engage with shuttles in tow for boarding parties.

A green light lit up on Teebu's console, a signal from the Consul that the last of the shuttles were away. "Helm, set course three-nine-five by two-seven, issue fall-back orders to location E."

Within 30 seconds, most of the fleet had jumped away including the Axios. The Astral Hammer's engines went up in an explosion as it had begun to jump away, but now sat adrift in space.

The battle itself had been lost, but Taldryan would live to see another day. And the war...could still be won.