

The Trouble with TC Pilots

Genie rubbed his temples gently and let out a deep sigh. He couldn't shake this feeling of déjà vu. His blue buns had been here before, saying the same words at the same time of year.

"Solohan, we need you for an important mission."

Well, those are the words he told Gytheran to say, anyway. Blue Buns was finally an Admiral and didn't have to address lowly FMs anymore! Dismissing Gytheran from his office under the guise of having a busy schedule, Genie flipped open his datapad and brought up the Chissian Singles app.

"A new match! Oh, she's 10 light years away...I wonder if Plif will grant me leave during RTF if I say it's a medical emergency?"

Gytheran rubbed his temples and let out a deep sigh. "There really isn't anyone else we can send on this mission besides that damned Ewok?". The Jawa had seen the giant stacks of paperwork on Genie's desk, many of which were leave requests from pilots that *just happened* to coincide with ~~Raise the Flag~~ the journey into the Chaos. Unfortunately, ol' Blue Buns was correct; between all the pilots out on missions and the pilots on leave, Gytheran and Solohan were the only pilots left who could be assigned the job...and the Jawa certainly wasn't gonna do it! He was a CMDR now and this was a job for a lowly FM.

"Solohan! Get your furry ass over here, double time!" the Jawa yelled at the Ewok pilot. The Ewok, mid-bite into his zucchini sandwich, finished the bite, stood up, took another bite, and slowly meandered over to the Lambda CMDR.

"By double time, you meant take two bites, right boss?" the Ewok mumbled through a mouthful of sandwich, sending slimy, green spittle onto the floor.

"Shut up and suit up Snuggles, a critical mission has come up and you're the only pilot we have left to send out there..." he said in the most commanding voice that he could before muttering "...unfortunately" under his breath.

"Gesundheit", Solo replied. "So what's the plan, Gytherino? Do you need me to crash into an enemy capital ship and make a big explosion? Or do you need me to crash into the enemy base and make a big explosion? Whatever you need exploded, you can count on me!". He then stood at attention and gave a salute as best as he could, which looked like a toddler smacking himself in the forehead more than anything else.

"This is gonna be your hardest mission yet, Snuggles. This time I need you to go scout a location and come back WITHOUT ANY EXPLOSIONS".

"Without explosions? What the hell am I supposed to do? That's like asking a nail gun not to nail, or a screw gun not to screw, or an Ewok to not hump the corner of the couch".

Truthfully, he didn't remember much else of what the Jawa said. Everything after "no explosions" was a bit like when an adult speaks in those Rebel propaganda movies, the ones about the pathetic, bald Rebel who can never kick the football.

"That filthy Rebel, Charlie Brown, will never kick the ball as long as Stormtrooper Lucy is holding it!", he chuckled silently to himself.

"Something about an old Imperial colonoscopy...no, a colony. Hmm...scouting it. Aaaand...shit, there was a reason I'm not supposed to explode anything.", he muttered to himself as he initiated the landing procedure of his Lambda Lambda-class *Lambduh* shuttle.

"Oh, right! 'We want to use it as a base!' he exclaimed, surprised that he remembered that many words in a row from his CMDR. He did his best to pat himself on the back for breaking his previous record of three words in a row, but got tangled up in his harness instead.

The *Lambduh* hovered a couple of feet above the ground before the engines cut out and it fell to the ground with a large, crashing sound, the landing gears groaning under the strain of the Ewok's "landing". The Ewok had landed in what appeared to be the remnants of a landing pad of the old, Imperial colony, though it was so overgrown that it was impossible to tell where the landing pad ended and where the ground began.

The rear ramp of the *Lambduh* descended and the Ewok exited the shuttle, surveying the area around him. It was very quiet, the only sounds being from the occasional bird in the distance. All around him were the remains of the industrial base that had been setup by the previous colony, decrepit and overgrown with local plant life. Imperial design was very clean and spartan but it required constant maintenance to keep it that way, and it was clear that this place hadn't been maintained in quite some time.

After surveying the remains of the colony for a short time, the Ewok pulled out his scanning equipment and got to work.

Many hours, and a few naps later, the Ewok was almost finished with the scouting mission. The colony was completely uninhabited and there were no signs of the original colonists. Any

evidence as to what had happened to them, if there was any to begin with, had been erased by the passage of time.

He entered the final, uncheck building, the old medical bay, eager to get back to the Hammer. He had brought two days worth of zucchini sandwiches but ate them all on the flight down and now, 8 hours later, his stomach grumbled. This building was the same as all the others, overgrown and in disrepair. He quickly glanced through the rooms, hurrying to finish this mission so he could go get some snacks, when he entered a room simply marked "Laboratory" and had to do a double take; inside the room was a small, glass case with an even smaller ball of fluff in it. On the desk next to the glass case were the remains of some empty bags of Imperial MREs, shredded almost to the point of being indistinguishable.

"Poor little guy, he must've been left here and died when the colonists left", the Ewok thought to himself as he inspected the MRE bags. He picked one up and sniffed it briefly, then started gagging as he smelled the decade old MREs. "These smell even worse than what we have now...and I'm pretty sure ours are made with Wookiee chunks." he thought as he tossed the bag back on the table.

He turned to leave, as the room was a bit strange but not noteworthy enough to investigate further, when the little ball of fluff in the glass case moved. The Ewok jumped back a few feet in terror and let out a short, high-pitched squeal, then gathered himself and went to investigate. He inched closer to the case and, indeed, the ball of fluff was moving.

"How the hell is this thing still alive?", the Ewok wondered briefly, but the thought quickly left his head as he focused more closely on the thing inside the case. It appeared to be a small, furry animal. It had no distinguishing features besides its roundness and fluffiness. There were no eyes or feet, as far as he could tell, yet he had the distinct feeling that this creature was staring into the depths of his soul. He stared back, blinking slowly as he tried to comprehend what he was looking at, when he had a sudden realization.

"In the name of the Golden Deity, this little guy is cute as a button!"

Overcome by the cuteness, Solohan slowly opened the glass case and reached inside to touch the creature. It offered no resistance as the Ewok slowly started touching it, then petting it, marveling at how soft the creature was and how satisfying it was to do so. He tentatively picked up the little furball and, when it continued to not resist, held it closely against him, petting it even more.

"I need to take you back to the Hammer and show you to everyone! Nobody will believe how cute you are!" the Ewok exclaimed to the creature, which made no response.

With the scouting mission having been completed, and the Ewok's attention fully diverted, he boarded the Lambda Lambda-class *Lambduh* and started the ascent towards the ISD Hammer.

Upon his arrival to the ship, it didn't take long for Solohan to show off the creature to everyone he could. Gytheran managed to wrangle him into the debriefing room and was only able to get "Nothing at the colony except my new pet. I've named him 'Jimothy', he seems like a Jimothy to me" out of him before the Ewok was fully engrossed with the creature again. Gytheran knew it was a lost cause to try and get the Ewok's attention; Ewok's either had no attention span or were laser focused on one thing and it was a fool's errand to try and change that.

The Jawa CMDR called Genie's office to give him the mission update but just got Genie's answering machine - "Hi, you've reached Rear Admiral Genie 'Blue Buns'. I will be on vacati---a very serious mission for the next week chasing tai---Rebels. If this is an emergency, please contact High Admiral Plif at extension 68419". He sighed to himself as he dialed Plif's extension, completely missing the fact that the Ewok was leaving the debriefing room behind him.

High Admiral Plif's Debriefing Room - A Week Later

"RA Genie, please give us your status report of Battlegroup I and make it quick. We still have a lot of cleanup to coordinate" Plif said curtly, the annoyance on his face clear to anyone with two working brain cells.

Genie's shoulders slumped, but he straightened himself out, pulled out his notebook, and started to give his debriefing.

"After the completion of the scouting mission on XC-50391, a previously unknown lifeform was brought on board by a Lambda pilot. The life form has been classified as a 'Muffle', though many pilots use its nickname of 'Jimothy'. The pilot in question failed to follow standard quarantine protocols and allowed the creature to roam the ship. It turned out that Jimothy...I mean the Muffle...was an invasive species that was able to consume food at an alarming rate. Even more problematic was that, when given an adequate food supply, they asexually reproduce at an alarming rate."

"The pilot in question managed to lose the original Muffle and it gained access to the ISD Hammer's food storage area. By the time it was first discovered, it had reproduced exponentially and had consumed 50% of our food stores. During our remediation efforts, it reproduced even further and consumed 90% of our food stores. Ultimately, we had to evacuate all non-essential personnel from the Hammer, equip essential personnel in space suits, and vent the entire ISD to space. Many lives were lost, as someone forgot to give the evacuation orders to the hangar crew."

"At least our new hangar crew doesn't know about the incident and we're gonna keep it that way. Small blessings", Genie mumbled to himself.

"In addition to the lost personnel, many valuable items were lost. CPT Wolfe's antique vacuum collection was lost, as were the Hammer's entire stockpile of toothbrushes and the phone number of a very beautif---important spy that I retrieved during my vacati...last mission."

"We've quintuple-checked that all the Mupples have been removed from the ship. We've torn apart every piece of floor plating and checked every pipe. No stone has been left unturned and every dark corner and hideaway has been inspected. I can say with one hundred percent certainty that the Muppet threat has been removed from Battlegroup I. As soon as we finish putting the ship back together and can run our safety checks, we'll be ready to get back under way". The Chiss Admiral closed his notebook and his shoulders slumped again.

"Genie, this is a monumental screw up, even for the Hammer. And *that's* saying something" Plif said in an admonishing tone. "You're extremely lucky that our position in the Chaos is so precarious. I can't afford to replace a Battlegroup Commander in the middle of all this. Go back to the Hammer, finish coordinating the repairs, and get your ship underway."

Genie straightened up a bit, thankful that his admonishment had been as light as it was.

"Also, you will not be allowed to go on leave for the remainder of our deployment in the Chaos, however long that is, and for twelve months after. Now get out of my sight. Dismissed." Plif said curtly and then turned his attention to the other Admirals in the room.

Genie's shoulders slumped even further than before as he shamefully left the room.

Finally alone in his quarters after a long week of hiding from Genie, Plif, and the family members of the hangar crew, Solohan jumped up into his desk chair, swinging his legs in the air as he spun around in the chair that was clearly designed for people twice his height. He pulled out a zucchini sandwich and started eating it, pausing as his eyes settled on what seemed to be a pile of Ewok-sized Imperial uniforms. He started pulling clothes away until a small, glass case was revealed. He took a piece of his sandwich and dropped it into the cage.

"Here you go, Jimothy, you must be hungry. Eat up!"