

# The Yellow Planet

by COL Mordred

It was one of those days. Mord was happy trying to mix and match the possible battles for the Squadron to fly on the simulator to gain another unit citation when ReMob 6 was announced.

"All pilots to the designated briefing room, all pilots to the designated briefing rooms" the mechanized voice echoed through the ISDII Challenge halls.

With a sigh he got up and began rounding up his pilots. It's been merely a month since Morgoth assumed command of the squadron and Mord was bumped up to Flight Three leader, and everything has been going great. And now Command would ruin this by giving him some real work to do.

Lieutenant Mrowaksu and Lieutenant Tiberia were probably hanging on the simulators, and Sublieutenant Iganadon was nowhere to be seen as usual. Some whispers of desertion were already in the air around the Hangar crew, much to Mord's dismay.

Arriving at the simulator room, Mordred nodded to Chief Filgs, the mechanical genius that ran this particular set of equipment. At her side, Captain Grendel was looking intently at the stats screen.

"Captain Grendel, Chief Filgs! What's the game today?"

"Hey Colonel, sir. Parallel running XWA TC 25." Chief Filgs replied.

"Race, Bronx, Tiberia and Mrowaksu each on their own instance. So far they are head-to-head. With those scores the entire squadron is in the upper 70s percentile now." Grendel added.

Mordred smiled with satisfaction. Over 70% meant they were reaching the High Score ratings. His pilots were good, but they had completely different approaches to the mission. Mrowaksu was all about firepower, which Tiberia focused on maneuverability. However, it kinda bugged him that the battle was spec'ed with old school TIEs in mind while his flight used TIE Punishers. He needed to get them to train with the heavy bombers as soon as possible. And that meant focusing on ReMob.

Damn.

"Grendel, did you hear about the meeting, we're supposed to go. Briefing from the TCCOM."

"Dang, now?"

"Unfortunately." Mord opened a channel to the simulator pods. "Attention Tempest, all pilots are to report to room M23, ReMob is here, we'll have a series of briefings."

"ReMob? Already?" Grendel sighed.

"Yeah, c'mon XO, Morgoth is probably looking for us. We'll survive." Mord patted Grendel on the shoulder.

Two days later in a system with a bunch of letters and numbers for a name, bordering the Tykon Rift, Mord was leading Flight Three in close formation with Flight Two. Ahead of them, a gigantic holoprojection of a Star Fortress Station, almost four times the size of a Golam 2. Dozens of virtual starfighters surrounded them, Flight One giving them cover. Almost 20km behind them, Typhoon Squadron was doing its own exercises. Keeping a close eye on both squadrons, the ISD2 Challenge cruised lazily around the AO perimeter, mirrored by the MC90 Renegade on the opposite side, where Eagle and Firebird Squadrons were resupplied for their next run.

Vice Admiral Locke Seltzer had decided to run the Op onboard of the Challenge this time, according to the parameters received by TCCOM. He paced slowly around the huge holotable where a faithful representation of the action was displayed in accordance with his preference.

An old Interdictor Cruiser nicknamed "Bugger 1" by the pilots diverted any long range missiles with its gravity well, making sure the pilots wouldn't just send a missile barrage from 4km away and go home for a nap.

"Tempest Two and Tempest Three, got you a clean path to their hangars, hurt them a bit for us, will ya?" Tempest 1-1 announced, and the flights reacted accordingly.

Flight One diverted towards a cloud of fighters approaching the group to hold them off, and Flight Two dived into the superstructure, Flight Three right behind, skimming the surface.

"Tempest 3, like we practice, let's go!" Mordred started calling targets for his flight. Tempest 3-2 focused on the turbolaser batteries, sending proton torpedoes at all clusters he could see. Tempest 3-4 went for the control tower, firing rockets.

The warheads were all duds, reacting to the holograms in virtual explosions.

Mordred almost got blinded by a nearby turbolaser cluster being hit by a torpedo, and brought his own artillery at the shield generators, preventing the enemy to ever recovering from the assault.

Just a hundred meters below, Tempest Two was flying parallel to Tempest Three, but inside the structure. CPT Grendel opened the blast doors with well-aimed concussion missiles and torpedoes, while LT Race and CM Bronx dropped delayed fuse bombs behind them.

The whole action lasted less than five minutes, the three flights finishing their run without any losses. As in a well-choreographed, Typhoon Squadron finished its action almost at the same time.

"Well executed, Wing X. Return for rearm and resupply while Wing XXII gets ready for their run." VA Locke Setzer gave the order and the Squadrons moved in formation to dock in the Challenge.

"Hey boss, do you know anything about the next phase?" Mordred asked Morgoth.

"We'll do speedruns against some old cruisers salvaged from the Kilji conflict, try to set some record on which squadron decimates the thing faster."

"Oh, I was worried it'd be something more challenging. We have 6 TIE Punishers on the run, just our first barrage can put a dent on an ISDII, not to mention an old cruiser." LT Mrowaksu laughed.

Wing XXII finished their run and was moving for rearm when Mord's Squadron received the green light to launch. Half a dozen tugs from engineering were in the area, so the Squadrons were limited to 1/3 throttle as they glided over the condemned hulls.

"Flight Three, form up, we're not on sightseeing."

"Yes sir, moving up."

Just as Mordred ascended to close the formation, the space ahead of them exploded in yellowish turbolaser fire as two Kilji Temlon Cruisers appeared in front of them, and a small freighter in front of them, dodging the fire as it could.

"All stations, all stations! We have boogies in the AO!" General Triji Boliv was the first to react, both squadrons splitting up.

"They must've been pulled from hyperspace by the Interdictor!" GN Silwar grunted as chatter exploded on the comms, and the Cruisers shifted fire towards the Challenge.

"Attention Battlegroup III, AO is hot, Kilji IFF redesignated Hostile. Fire at will. Be kind and remove those cruisers from my backyard." VA Locke's voice was anything but calm. It had taken so long to organize this training to earn points in the TIE Corps ReMob and now this... Real enemies didn't count for the score.

The cruisers launched twelve assault shuttles that continued the pursuit on the freighter.

"Typhoon, follow the freighter. Tempest, focus on the cruisers. Eagle and Firebird are still reloading and will reinforce in a few." The BG3COM ordered.

Tempest One hammered the first cruiser with ion, its shield faltering, and Tempest Two delivered its payload at melee range. The result was a catastrophic reactor failure.

As Tempest One maneuvered back to attack the second cruiser, Tempest 3 aligned for the kill. Again, as the shield lost coherence, the enemy got twelve lovely rockets in its broadside. The results were less cinematographic, by the cruiser was just as gone.

Meanwhile, Typhoon went after the shuttles to protect the freighter, taking one of them before the other could even start evasive maneuvers.

"Challenge Control, this is Typhoon 1-1, got an ID on the freighter, it's the 'Oberon Gazelle', transmitting codes now."

"Typhoon 1-1, this is BG3COM. That freighter is on a long list of wanted ships, consider it a primary target for disable."

"Affirmative, BG3COM, target for disable. Typhoon Two and Three, get rid of those shuttles, we'll focus on the freighter."

Ion blasts rained on the freighter from the TIE Defenders of Typhoon One, and the shuttles were being picked one by one by the rest of the squadron, until suddenly the freighter cleared the gravity well and made the pseudo-movement of a jump into hyperspace, closely followed by the shuttles.

"Attention all Squadrons, we have the jump vector! Transmitting coordinates, BG3COM orders all squadrons to pursuit." Challenge Control announced.

The stars became stripes that soon became a torrent of blueish light. Barely two minutes later the squadrons exited hyperspace in front of the 2nd planet around a dim whiteish star, just in time to see the freighter and eight of the remaining shuttlers drop into the atmosphere, near the dusk line.

It was dense and yellowish, with high winds. "Visibility low, use active sensors and stay alert!" Morgoth ordered, plunging into the mist.

The radars showed the nine little dots in front of them, flying almost in formation, until something BIG blinked on the bow sensor array, making a beeline for the freighter.

"There's something out there, navcomp says probably biological!" Tempest 1-2 informed. Barely five seconds later, the blips collided and vanished into the cloud. The shuttles took a turn, entering a search pattern, but the TIEs reached them before long.

"Get them but watch out for the other boogies!" Grendel ordered.

"And turn on active parking sensors, it'll add us a klick or so in detection range." Replied Mordred.

"Sounds goo--" Morgoth didn't have time to deploy. A immense creature cut in front of them, leathery skin with huge wings and a reptilian face rose in from of him, and he was only saved by honed reflexes from years of practice in the cockpit.

"Break! Break! Break!"

"That's a bloody dragon!!!" Someone shouted over the "woaaaa!" and "daaaamn" chatter.

The fighters split and the dragon stopped midair beating its wings, looking almost amused at the tiny targets.

Still with the sensor suit on full blast, Mordred picked up the freighter again. "Got the freighter on the ground, assigning coordinates D33T55. There's an emergency be--"

Another dragon rose from the mist and lounged towards Tempest 2-4.

"Everybody up!!!" Was the only thing that Mordred was able to yell as he took a dive into the beast's mouth, hammering its jaw with the side of his TIE Punisher. The beast

reeled, missing Tempest 2-4 by a couple of meters, forcing the beast to recoil from the crash instead of eating the other fighter whole.

Morgoth heard his friend grunt and calmly walk through his crash land check list, but there was nothing he could do.

"Lost left generator array, launcher pods damaged, can't remain in the air, I'm going down. Spiraling out of control. Emergency systems engaged, beacon online, repulsorlift buoy online, hitting the ground in 5, 4, 3..." static filled the comms.

The fallen TIE was still transmitting the radar information, and Morgoth gathered some data. "Tempest, let's go to orbit, we can't face those creatures in knife range with our warheads. We need to regroup".

"He crash-landed." Locke's voice was monotonic as MAJ Morgoth finished the briefing.

"On the planet sir, attacked by a beast."

"I surmised as much. So, he crash-landed... Again."

"It seems so, yes."

"Tell me Morgoth, why is that idiot allowed to fly, again?"

"The current theory is Bureaucracy, sir."

"I don't get it, is he good at it?"

"He excels at dodging it sir. Can't demote a phantom. Colo tried and got himself promoted instead."

Locke sighed and poked a button on his desk, a shadowy hologram representing the planet.

"Alright, there's work to do. Obviously, we cannot give the Kilji what they want, whatever it is. What's the situation in orbit?"

"Tempest 2 and 3 are patrolling the skies, a Kilji corvette entered orbit but left as soon as the TIEs made a move. We're still receiving some emergency beacons. One is Mordred's, very close to the freighter's beacon. Some 40km further north we have the other three beacons, all from assault shuttles. There's one that apparently was completely destroyed."

"Excellent initiative. That mist is a serious hazard, not to mention those giant creatures. How sure we are our Colonel is still alive? Can we retrieve him?"

"Yeah, he's alive. we are getting target designations. I think Mordred is painting targets in the surface and it matches our estimative. I gave Tempest the order to drop all they have on the targets."

"Good initiative. Any comm or information?"

"Nothing sir. The Punisher is a beast of a craft, but he rammed it at full speed to save 2-4. I doubt there was much working after the crash.

"Could he be hurt?"

"Mordred has one defining quality and that's surviving ridiculous crashes. He is an expert, sir. I don't think I've ever seen him have a proper landing, but I also have never seen him with much more than a bandage. Hangar gossip says his worst crash injury was a broken nail. He also had stormtrooper training before he was recruited into TC as a shuttle pilot a long time ago."

Locke took a breath to gather all data in account. He clicked a few buttons, and the equipment delivered him a coded cylinder.

"Very well, I'm calling in our support ships and will dispatch the Battlegroup to secure the planet. I'll arrange Typhoon to cover for your pilots to rearm and rest a bit."

The Admiral dismissed Morgoth and turned to the comm operator.

"Chief, call in the supply vessels and get the Renegade on comms. I want Firebird and Eagle ready to sortie in four hours, we've got a pilot down."

"Is it the Colonel, sir?" The Chief looked up from his station eagerly.

"Yes Barkhorn, it is Colonel Mordred. How could you know?"

"Oh we have a long bet running. He'll be alright then. Luck of the devil that one." The Chief smiled.

"Just send the message, Chief." Locke rolled his eyes. "And let Captain Ballo know I'm going down for a visit."

"Yes sir, sending now."

VA Locke left the bridge in the turbolift and arrived momentarily at Hammer's Fist's station. Captain Ballo arrived together with him at the Hammer's Fist's Blast Company Commander office.

"Admiral Locke! I believe you wanted to speak with me?"

"That's correct Captain, we have a man down in a little planet called HE-31T9, and I'd like to formally request Hammer's Fist's support to retrieve the little bugger."

"Let me guess, Mordred again?" The Captain smiled ear to ear.

"I know I'm new as BG3COM, but how the heck can he sustain such reputation?" Locked grimaced.

"Very easily it seems. He takes a lot of risks to cover other pilots and gets shot down a lot. Normally we just send a shuttle to retrieve him in the middle of a deserted planetary body. I like to use him to give my troopers some training. Sounds familiar?"

"Yes, but this time he might be in a terrible mess. Check this coded cylinder. We've got hostile fauna and Kilji presence on the planet. The Battlegroup is going down in force

to secure the location, and we might have some secondary objectives as well, considering the other ships that went down."

Ballo perused through the information on her commpad information with great interest.

"Mordred's beacon is it still transmitting? But no movement?"

"Tempest 2 is in orbit and since the last check in they registered some explosions on the surface. Captain Grendel went into high atmosphere to check and found Mordred's target designator marking artillery targets. Ever since they are doing short runs into the atmosphere to drop their payloads. The Kilji are lurking nearby, so Grendel is not going overboard with it."

"What's our timeline?"

"How long do you need? I gave the squadrons four hours to get ready."

"We can work with that."

"I'll update the map as we uncover new data."

The Captain saluted and Locke made his way back to the bridge. It's not protocol for a BGCCOM to make his way into grunt country, but the walk gave him time to put some ideas in order.

Mordred was not just a Hammer's Fist drop-out that made into flight school. He also made into the elite squadrons and with success enough to catch the eye of the Order and is already a Marauder. The crew had ongoing bets on when Mord would finally be able to land a craft without scratching the paint or some sort of catastrophic event, but the little bastard was competent enough when they were on the thick of it, and versatile enough on the ground to survive. He had no doubt in some whiteboard hidden in the ship there would be a list of troubles Mord would face this time.

The ISDII Challenge arrived on HE-31T9 some three hours later, leaving the supply convoy to finish up with the MC90 Renegade. The Tempest fighters on orbit were recalled for resupplies and a bit of rest while Typhoon took their place in close escort.

With the powerful sensor arrays of the Challenge, the science officer started mapping the target region, and found a massive battle with thousands of life signs. Once in a while the dragons would sweep a side of the field, leaving a dent on the formation.

"It's a class 5 semi-habitable planet, sir. There should be some spots covered in mycelia and mushroom formations are found in the valleys and craters. The whole action happened in a valley, big mushroom-like formations. The atmosphere was as thick as the day before, high winds and occasional thunder." Captain Catrer, the Challenge SCO:A explained. "These 'Dragons' are a variant of Arkanian Dragons from what we could gather from the sensor data Tempest Squadron gathered. Vicious things, practically immune to blaster fire, ions may help disperse them as we stated before. Also, from the orbital

readings on the surface, we have class 2 and 3 life stages all over the place, expect crustaceous lifeforms and Acklay-like beasts."

"Like Felucia then?" Locke asked.

"Oddly enough, no. Well, only parts of it, most of the planet are dry icy plateaus which cover the rest in dew every night. The mean difference in altitudes between the plateaus and the valleys is almost 9km."

"How far have we mapped the area?"

"Around 400km around the primary target, we have three main avenues of approach to that particular crater."

A beep in the nearby console caught Locke's attention.

"Admiral, sir, the Renegade has joined us and is awaiting orders."

"Very well, tell them to flank the target region Captain Catrer has outlined while we decide on the best attack plan."

"Sir, one more thing."

"Go on, chief."

"It's been a couple of hours since we had a target designation but now we've got reads all over the place."

"Catrer, open your map. Can you give me multiple overlays with all the data we've got?"

The holotable formed the map with its pale blue lines, denoting the terrain, the life signs on the surface and Mord's call for artillery.

"Give me the beacons and can you separate the dragons from human sized life?"

"Yes sir." At each button pressed, the map looked more and more complex.

The crater where the action was happening was about 20° south of the equatorial line, and its middle was designated Operation Meridian Zero. A large valley, 100km long and 30km wide cut the planet in a 45° angle from the equator, its line crossing under the centerline of the crater. Parallel to the main valley, a small trench 10km wide, and only 90km long ended up in the north side of the crater.

Mordred and the freighter were located on the east bank, and the sensor analysis showed a significant presence nearby, high probability of being tribal village of sorts.

"We've got designator hits all over this line, southeast by northwest, and there are some energy spikes over the northwest line. We believe it's the Kilji, but we can't confirm it without a visual scan. Of note, the dragons changed their behavior quite noticeably over the night. Overlaying our scans with Captain Grendel's you can see that they are exclusively flying over the Northwest area now."

"Probably means the opponents have some kind of influence on them." Ballo observed.



"Or the natives." Locked completed.

"Sir!" The Tac station called.

"Yes, lieutenant?"

"Sensors reveal a Kilji fleet on the opposite side of the planet. The Renegade informs there are two dozen landing craft on their way to the AO. About four squadrons of fighters on escort."

VA Locke moved to the Comm station and after a second or two, started delivering the orders.

"Challenger and Renegade, move to intercept the cruisers. Assign Eagle and Firebird to space superiority. Typhoon is to cover our transports and Tempest on CAS. Captain Ballo that we'll need the troopers on the ground, make it happen."

Morgoth climbed into his TIE Defender cockpit and gave the okay signal to the hangar crew. Behind him, Tempest Squadron was getting ready for launch, and the admiral's face appeared on the holoboard.

"Attention all units, Kilji forces entered the system, orders updated."

Morgoth took a deep breath and unlocked his TIE from the gantry in Hangar 4, leaving the Challenge Control Zone at half throttle while checking his orders, his squadron forming up behind him. Typhoon came next and the Assault Shuttles left hangar in trios.

Tempest Three was already flying at low orbit, occasionally sending a bomb to the conflict below.

"Okay people, form up. We'll go down into that valley as a unit, no heroics. SCO informs that if a dragon attacks you just blast it with your ions, it'll have more effect scaring it away than trying to damage with lasers. Stay alert for any signs of our boy, especially the target painter. Intel suggests the southeast quadrant is friendly and the northwest is hostile, but we have no confirmations."

The TIEs zoomed down, going as low as they could following the new maps. About halfway into the trench, a dragon passed over them.

"Hold your fire, it's not looking for us." Grendel pointed out.

Two more dragons joined them, flying side by side with the squadron.

"It's not that I'm nervous, but what the heck?" Iam muttered.

"Focus, just ignore them and try not to pull a Mord and smack them. We're reaching the bottom of the valley, 30 klicks to go." Morgoth instructed them and called for the others. "Tempest 3-2 this is 1-1, we're coming up the south trench. Updating map and telemetry to you nav computer."

"Roger 1-1, we're 5 clicks ahead, circling back. Nav comp data updated. Be advise, the dragons are following us around and hammering the Kilji when we fly over to drop bombs." LT Tiberia answered.

"Yep, we've noticed that. We'll go 2/3rd and wait for you." Morgoth answered.

A couple more dragons joined the flight, each so massive that the TIEs were almost touching wings. They looked curiously at the noisy fighters and replied with a high pitch scream as if they were imitating them.

The valley opened into a great field, so huge that you could barely see the walls around them. Firefighting illuminated the morning skies under the mist, still dense enough to prevent any positive ID of friendly forces.

"Got a ping! Seven kilometers northeast. Flight Three, do a fly by on the targeted zone and identify the forces at play."

"Yessir!" Lieutenant Tiberia and Lieutenant Mrowaksu detached themselves from the formation.

The other flights skimmed the mushroom forest, sending spore clouds on their trail, looking for the beacon signals. Their dragon escort rose to the clouds, hidden from sight. All Morgoth could see was the radar dots gaining altitude and dropping at incredible speeds one by one.

"All stations, Tempest 1-1. The dragons are displaying friendly behavior and are dropping hard against the predicted enemy fields. Do not engage unless attacked!"

"Roger Tempest 1-1, message relayed to all commands." Challenge TAC replied.

"Tempest, keep at half throttle until we get a positive from Flight Three."

"Sir, 3-2 here." LT Tiberia cut in. "We've already got Tempest 3-1 IFF beacon in sights. There are some natives around, and... Uh, it looks like they are cheering for us."

"Is our favorite Chiss among them?"

"Can't give a positive ID from this high but-"

"We're under attack!" LT Mrowaksu cut Tiberia. "From the other side of the field, two clicks. That's definitely blaster fire aimed at us. It's ineffective though."

"And there's the designator painting targets, and the dragons! It's a full-fledged circus, sir!"

"Alright, keep station." Morgoth switch channels to the close command circuit.

"Challenge Control, this is Tempest 1-1. We've found tempest 3-1 and we are being fired up from the opposite lines. Sending the coordinates."

"Tempest 1-1, this is BG3COM, we are relaying the coordinates to Blast Company. We have info that the enemy managed to land more of their units, watch out for AA fire. Typhoon is needed in orbit, things are getting interesting here, so you'll have to cover the troops."

Captain Ballo was trying hard not to smile, but it's been ages since she last saw some good action. Finding a pilot in the middle of a battle with natives, dragons and Kilji fanatics was in her top 10.

She'd never admit it to the Command, but she was very glad the enemy had such a presence in place. Also, dragons.

"Landing in minus 60!" The pilot let them know.

"Alright, Company!" She broadcasted to all ships. "We got a live fight ahead, TAC reports the natives, or what we presume to be natives, and the dragons are friendly! The Kilji, on the other hand, are not friendly. Let's teach them what the Hammer's Fist does to unfriendly types around here!" She locked her helmet and smacked it twice for luck and took a breath, as the lander doors opened and she stepped outside with Vendetta Platoon 1 on her back.

In her long years of service, Jyn Ballo invaded stations, continents, entire planets, and as such was ready for a hot drop. She was not, however, ready for two hundred people dressed in chitin armor and obsidian blades, all chanting "Etch Efi! Etch Efi! Etch Efi! "

A huge group of acklays-like creatures with riders walked past them, and what seemed to be a Warleader, dressed in ornated chitin plates, was riding on top the biggest of all acklays, with a blaster in hand yelling commands!

"Baru Etch Efi! Hare Ho! Hare Ho!"

That galvanized the natives, and they scrambled in the direction of Kilji lines.

"What the heck..." Lieutenant Mora whispered behind Ballo.

"Indeed. Well, troopers, we got our targets! Let's go! Vengeance Platoon, open around the native wave and cover their left flank. Lieutenant Mora, take Vendetta with the natives!"

It should be an interesting day, alright.

"Admiral Locke, sir, we've got news from the surface and a tactical update."

"Good, show me."

"All Assault shuttles landed successfully, Captain Ballo made contact with the natives and they were... uh... 'expecting them". Her words. They joined the fight and found some heavy equipment being assembled by the enemy. Her troopers are also painting targets and Tempest Squadron is almost in need of resupplies. Also, they have pinpointed the exact location of the freighter beacon, oddly enough at near exact center of the conflict."

The map was updated with live info of the attack.

"Can we expedite things with an orbital barrage?"

"TAC advises against it, now that we have Stormtroopers on the ground. Also, we can hit the friendly flying creatures and natives."

Three huge dots approached the AO from the south, joining the other dragons. They danced around the smaller dots and landed in the middle of Kilji lines, the others following.

"Blood and Misery, do we have a visual deep into the Kilji line?"

"Just snapshots from the troopers, cloud cover keeps the bandwidth low. Assembling latest pictures now."

Images of the stormtroopers running from cover to cover with the natives under heavy laser fire populated the holodisplay. One particular squad was trying to reach the lost freighter in the middle of the crater. Images of the dragons overhead flying low overhead, and then dropping in the Kilji.

"What a mess... I wonder what's on that freighter..." Locke pondered for a moment. "Focus sensors on the location and gimme everything you can gather about it." He ordered. "Can we reach the rest of the Fleet? If not, send a hyperspace comm buoy and query all known information on the Oberon Gazelle and ships with similar engine signature. They're a known smuggler vessel, they should have other IFFs."

"Yes, sir." The officer nodded firmly to the Admiral and got to work.

The X-Wing feinted to the left and broke left high, crossing the path of the Kilji fighter, who tried to avoid collision by rolling right, straight into the laser lock of the second X-Wing on the maneuver.

"Scratch another one!" Captain Xylo Pethtel confirmed with a smirk. "Gotta tell you boss, Mord can be a pain sometimes, but he does find us some interesting fights."

"Sometimes?" Captain Miles Prower replied. "I've been Mord's boss a couple of time in the past, I'm sure he qualifies for a 'most of the times' situation!" They laughed together. The Kilji didn't, losing yet two more fighters in a matter of seconds.

Their fighters were not exactly state of the art after the whole bacon sizzling in the Tykon Rift, but they could be fun to beat, especially two-to-one odds like now.

Eagle and Firebird have been fighting non-stop for about two hours now, while Typhoon hammered the cruisers with heavy fire. The Renegade had moved into close hand and the space between them was sparkling with static energy and heavy turbolaser fire, adding another lever of stress to the fighters. The Challenge was staying over the AO for now, but if that beast joined the space battle, things would get really hot, really fast.

"Sir? Do you believe he really did it? Crashed his TIE in a dragon?" LT Axfive asked.

"I have no question whatsoever that he would do the most idiotic thing possible instead of looking for a simple solution." Miles grunted. "Now focus, this is more about our blue man, we have enemies to destroy!"

Captain Ballo was having the fun of her life. Stormtroopers were a shock force, meant to display force more often than actually beating others into pulp. There's been lots of previous engagements, of course, but this was going great.

Much of her good mood was attributed to the fact none of her troopers had been severely injured so far. Her corpsmen were all busy with helping the natives so far, and she aimed to keep it that way.

The TIEs from Tempest Squadron flew over her head once more, dropping bombs on the enemies, but they were well in cover and the blasts had little effect. More than once she saw a Punisher dash from the attack line to avoid colliding with a dragon.

Vengeance Platoon first squad reached the freighter just a minute ago, no survivors, but there were two droids cowering inside, unarmed. The admiral wouldn't be happy to know his perps were done for, but the ship could still provide answers.

A loud bang took everyone by surprise, but the banging continued in a steady rhythm.

"That sounded like turbo lasers! Second squad, got visual on the cannon?"

"Negative, it's too far from the line! 5 klicks give or take! They are firing at the dragons, which are running to the mushrooms for cover." More blast fire and explosions in the distance. "Look like they're focusing on the ground units now!"

"Get everyone behind cover! Mark a line for artillery!" She ordered her troops while a mushroom tree exploded nearby. Ballo grunted a few curse words to herself and switched her comm to the Challenge.

"Challenge Control, this is Blast Actual. Friendly Native Air Support compromised by turbolaser fire and has cleared the area. They are about 5 klicks behind the engagement line. We'd really appreciate it if you could deliver them some love. Marking the start of our lines, everything northwest of it is fair play. "

"Blast, this is Challenge Control, keep your heads down, delivering creeping barrage, north of saturation fire t30 by 30."

Ballo switched comms and recalled the stormtroopers, who then called the natives nearby to cover. The acklay riders also started to order the troops to maintain cover.

Thirty seconds passed by, and the world became green.

As beautiful as it was terrifying, the Challenge rained green turbolaser destruction right in the middle of the Kilji. Dust and spores and some body parts were thrown into the air.

The Stormtroopers of Hammer's Fist's Blast Company cheered the destruction, while the natives cowered. Even the dragons were nowhere to be seen. Half a minute later, and the barrage stopped, the field was silent but for some moaning.

"Blast Actual, Challenge Control. Our scopes are clear, can you confirm target destruction?"

"One second Challenge, visibility severely compromised now."

After two minutes the stormtroopers closer to the Kilji line returned reports.

"Challenge, Blast actual, we confirm the destruction of the heavy artillery and most of the enemy formations. We'll handle the stragglers, thanks for the support."

Ballo checked her E-11, smacked the side of her helmet twice for luck and lead her troops again into battle.

Morgoth was not having a nice day. Close Air support was great for the TIE Punishers, but the TIE Defenders had little to do in the battle. He did find it amusing that the Dragons kept following the bombers, making high pitched noises. Quite like the Twin Ion Engines in atmosphere.

Minutes ago, the ISD2 Challenge delivered a controlled barrage on the battlefield, and now the Stormtroopers alongside the Native were finally making advances. They had control of the fallen freighter and were opening the line to box in the Kilji.

Since Flight Two and Three were busy, Morgoth took Flight One into a low speed pass over the clearing created by the orbital fire. There wasn't much to see. Couple of troops here and there, the machinery all destroyed.

A lone landing craft tried to take off, but Tempest 1-4 put it down with a salvo of laser fire.

"Well shot, 1-4. Let's circle the area and keep the lookout for enemies trying to escape." Morgoth ordered them.

The landing craft were all a mess, the gunners up in the Destroyer wrecked the lot of them. Some soldiers were hiding under the wrecks, others were throwing their weapons to the floor and trying to surrender. The natives were not amused.

As a wave, the Natives flooded over the survivors of the Kilji troops, with the acklays things walking over their heads and the Stormtroopers trying to maintain squad cohesion while advancing.

The few pockets of organized resistance were promptly pulverized by the Tempest bombers. The dragons returned *en masse* to the battlefield, some even landing and walking near the natives, feasting on the fallen bodies of the Kilji.

"Tempest, this is Blast Actual, there's a Kilji landing shuttle at grid R393 J211, my troopers report seeing adorned armor, possible leadership."

"Blast, Tempest here, solid copy. Tempest One switching to ions, target preservation protocol."

Tempest's first Flight turned to port and gained some altitude, lurking along the crater walls.

"Got it, bearing 233!" Said Tempest 1-2. "It's turning to face the valley up north!"

"Go, go, go! Before it gets any altitude!" Morgoth turned to the target, following the rest of the flight.

"Making a pass! Verigos, are you with me?" Tempest 1-2 called.

"Right on your tail, Thinking. Open the show and I'll make sure they see double for a week." Tempest 1-3 replied as Tempest 1-2 started firing his ions seconds before they were in range. Once the lock was green the enemy was already receiving a few hits and the readouts showed its speed dropping.

Once locked, both Defenders delivered the full power of the twin ion canons on the poor shuttle, and it kicked like a nerf and headed straight down, hitting a puffy mushroom on the way down. A cloud of purple spores blew up high while the pilots celebrated.

"Blast, this is Tempest 1-1, we got your shuttle, they are waiting for you at R423 j215. We'll keep the skies clean."

"Roger, Tempest, we are on our way. Thanks for the support."

They made a wide turn over and headed back to the AO. Two dragons descended from the clouds and joined the formation, making the high pitch noises so loud Morgoth turned on the external dampener of his helmet.

"Tempest, this is Challenge TAC. Renegade informs the cruisers are almost gone, but they've launched fighters directly into the atmosphere. Watch out by grid P89 G25."

"Roger Challenge, Tempest copies." Morgoth replied. "Eyes peeled, we've got incoming."

Just as they completed the turn to face north, Silwar called out. "Got them, going straight down the middle, their vector will take them directly at the freighter."

"They want to destroy it!" Iam pointed out.

"Blast, this is Tempest, enemies making a beeline for the freighter. Things might get dicey until we regain air superiority."

"Roger Tempest, well try to get clear." Ballo replied from the surface.

"Okay people, get your mean faces on and let's go. Free fire."

The Defenders accelerated and moved to disrupt the enemy approaching. Morgoth banked left and trailed the enemy fighter spearing the attack until he managed three solid hits on its left wing and propulsor, which sent it spiraling down until it hit a tree.

The other Defenders from Tempest were tracking their targets with occasional for when the skies darkened above them.

"Everybody disengage now!" Morgoth ordered. As they broke off the attack, two dozen dragons descended from the clouds over the enemy fighters, obliterating the incoming wave.

A particularly huge dragon glided lazily over the action, giving out their unique high-pitched whistle.

"Boss, I think it's the sound. The Ion engine whistle." Iam pondered.

"I think you are correct." Morgoth replied. "It's one of those things that sounds familiar but you don't realize until someone points out."

"So, we are friendly because the engine whining? I'm never complaining again about it!" Verigos laughed.

"Well, our dragon friends took care of that problem for us, let's regroup with the others and cover the AO."

The last couple of Kilji soldiers were desperately trying to put an E-Web Heavy laser together, but one of Vengeance's stormtroopers got them pinned again.

"Well done, Leandros. Kuro, take your guys and circle back and make sure they surrender, or don't." Lieutenant Mora ordered, and the fireteam split. Not a minute later, laser fire came from the cover.

"They didn't even give us a chance to call for surrender, bloody fanatics." Kuro called on the platoon channel.

"What is done is done. Guess we are all clear here, Captain." Mora signaled the Company Commander. Stormtroopers were now walking more relaxed; all foxholes had been purged and no enemies on the AO.

"Alright people, excellent job. Mora, Joms, gimme a list of casualties and how we are on supplies. I'm going for the freighter." Captain Ballo ordered.

"Yes sir" Mora ordered. "Malkins, take your team and cover the CC. Nious, send me a runner to the triage station." Mora started barking orders. Satisfied, Captain Ballo nodded to her escort and moved at a good pace to the freighter. A fireteam had the location secure, and they made way for her to pass.

The freighter was mess, one could see precisely where the giant teeth of the dragon crushed the hull. She could even see the reactor from the outside and it had a nice puncture in the casing, but apparently no leaks.

Entering by one of the cracks, she found the two droids mentioned before. A tiny mouse droid was cowering behind an incredible outdated astromech unit, who was also shaking a little.



"Hey little guys, are you okay? That was a nasty crash."

The astromech whistled a bit, and Ballo's helmet translated it. "*No harm, please, no harm! we got stolen from palace!*"

"Oh, the Kilji palace? What are your names and function?"

"*T5-D2, shipping lane databank manager, this is my counterpart, K9-i8, courier runner.*"

"And the thieves?"

"*Cockpit, they dead now.*"

"Did you like the palace?"

T5 gave out a low whistle like a sigh.

"*Too many bad people! Bad nobles, bad king, bad thieves...*"

"Alright. I'm sorry to say but the Kilji are our enemies as well, but if you want, I'm sure we can find a place for you to get assigned to."

"*Only want to serve in peace.*"

"I'll see what I can do."

Ballo went to check the cockpit of the ship, and found it mangled beyond recognition. But something was off, no blood. Examining the debris she found an arm, mummified with the skin flaking off.

"Oh, look at that... The plot thickens." She muttered to herself. No doubt Imperial Security Bureau will have a field day on the freighter.

Natives cheering outside caught her attention, and she left the crash site to find the biggest dragon she'd ever seen licking the face of the Warlord, who almost fell off his 4-meter tall acklay. The Warleader shouted a few words at the crowd, who made an opening and three strong warriors carrying bundles of meat passed through. One of them threw something to the Warleader, who caught it with a "woof" sound. Ballo zoomed in with her helmet scope and it was a whole humanoid leg, and by the color, it was a Kilji leg. The boss grabbed it by the ankle, twisted his body and threw the leg away from the crowd. The dragon yelped like a puppy, running off to fetch the leg.

"Modu! Modu! Modu!" The natives chanted.

"Modu?" Ballo raised an eyebrow. "Oh, you can't be real... Challenge Control, Blast actual here... Wait..." Ballo froze in place watching the scene.

The Warleader raised his arms to the sky and even some troopers cheered him, then he noticed Ballo and climbed off the Acklay. His helmet had a glowing sparkling gem the size of thermal detonator on the forehead, and many smaller gems all over it, sparkling in hues of red. He was also wearing a survivor kit on the belt and a battered E-11 on sling over his chest.

"Blast, this is BG3COM, are you there?"

The Warleader stopped in front of the captain and removed his helmet.

"Challenge, I've found our pilot."

"Hey Cap'an!" Mordred saluted her, his face a mess.