

“Commander, I need to ask you a favor.” Major Genie looked down at a datapad on his impressive new desk in a corner office.

“Of course, Major. What’s the damage? Who needs killing?” Commander Xye asked.

“No, not the usual today I’m afraid. It’s for the good of the Fleet this time.” Genie said, looking up from his datapad.

“I need you to become a shield technician.”

“A what?” Xye asked.

“A shield technician!” Genie said, loudly this time.

“Ok, ok. What does that mean though?”

“You get to learn how to operate shields in the field and maintain them on the ships. This will help us in the future when the Lambda’s shuttle has another shield malfunction.” Genie said.

“Command is making you fix the shields on the shuttle whenever you have too many BE-specials you mean?” Xye asked.

“Enough questions! The course begins immediately in hangar 11. Go!” Major Genie throws the datapad at Commander Xye but it merely hits him and falls to the ground. Xye grabs the datapad off the floor and awkwardly leaves for the hanger.

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When he arrives, Commander Xye finds the hangar buzzing with the usual assortment of starship technicians working on craft of various states of disrepair. A single Low Altitude Assault Transport, or LAAT, Republic Gunship from the Clone Wars era sat clearly out of place among them.

“Welcome, Commander.” BE-37, the Hammer’s bartender/bouncer/droid-erotica-writer called out to Xye near the LAAT.

BE was a KX-series security droid; a tall, imposing droid to most, but a pathetic waste to those who really knew him.

“BE. What the hell are you doing here?” Xye asked.

“I’m here to administer your shield technician test, Commander. You and Lieutenant Solohan are listed here as the two students for shield technician training.” BE said.

“Reporting for duty, sirs.” Lieutenant Solohan looked like he just rolled out of bed (was that Wookiee hair on his uniform? That’s certainly not regulation whatever he’s wearing).

“Welcome, Lieutenant,” BE said.

“Today we’re going to learn to operate and repair the shields on this vessel.”

“Aren’t these things like priceless relics?” Xye asked.

“Did these even have shields equipped?” Solohan chimed in.

At a glance, the vessel had two large wings that folded down to help with atmospheric flight. It also had two very distinctive side-pod guns, each of which had room for a gunner. It was clear the vessel was not meant for two pilots and a bartender droid solely to safely operate and field-repair at the same time.

“Regardless of those asinine questions, this mission, should you choose to accept it, it’s compulsory so you are, will require both of you to operate and repair the vessel in a combat situation.”

“What? Aren’t there any study materials? Books? Exams? Anything remotely resembling a class?” Solohan asked.

“Silence! No more questions! Hop in pilots, time is of the absolute essence.”

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BE-37 entered the LAAT first, taking control of the first pilot position in the cockpit. Xye was next, sitting next to BE in the second seat.

“No, wrong. Commander, that’s one point docked from the test.” BE said. “You are to sit in the port side front gunner position. This is obviously a test for shielding, not flying.”

“What? You’re not even a pilot, BE, I’m not going on a suicide mission.” Xye said.

“Lieutenant, assume the position in the starboard gun bubble thing.” BE said.

“The what?” Solohan asked.

“The thing that shoots the green meme beam.” BE said dismissively.

The pilots reluctantly did as they were told. The controls in front of them flickered to life; the ship clearly hadn’t been used in years, possibly decades, and it felt like the controls might not even work at all. The two human pilots felt the vessel lurch hard to port as they exited the hanger.

“Our mission parameters are simple. We are to engage a pirate outpost far away from the fleet. Our primary objective is to sustain enough damage from the base that you will be able to do field repairs as we go. Our secondary objective is to requisition any supplies from the base as to throw off the New Republic into thinking we are in need of them. Our hidden objectives are obviously hidden so I can’t tell you. Idiots.”

“Be nice, BE. I’m pretty sure you’re making 99% of this up but we’re already in space so we don’t really have a choice now.” Xye said, attempting to adjust his seat, but only managing to pull out more of the cushioning worn out of the seams.

“Wait, aren’t these things called ‘low altitude’ for a reason? How are we-”

“Silence, Lieutenant!” BE said as he briefly cut off Solohan’s communicator. “Prepare for the jump to hyperspace. We will be flying directly into the pirate’s territory so be prepared.”

“Wait. I didn’t even wear my suit, how are we going to survive vacuum -” Was all Xye was able to get out as they jumped to hyperspace.

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The LAAT exited hyperspace close to the pirate's platform as described. The platform looked relatively well-defended, with a complement of roughly a dozen Z-95s at a glance. The platform also appeared to be fully equipped with its own turbo-lasers, easily capable of holding off a capital ship, let alone a single infantry transport.

A voice came over the LAAT's comm: "Unidentified vessel, this is the platform Kwynthest. Prepare for immediate boarding. Do not attempt to resist."

"Pilots, prepare to immediately resist." BE said. "I'm raising all power to your weapons with a slight auxiliary in shields for you to repair."

"Solohan, it was kind of a pleasure to serve with you. At least we did a thing." Xye said with resignation.

"Yeah...I guess." Solohan replied.

A single shuttle began to approach them backed by two Z-95s.

"All firepower to that shuttle! Now!" BE ordered.

The pilots in their gunnery positions scrambled to find something resembling a trigger, a missile, anything to defend themselves with. Solohan was first to figure his controls out as a green beam gave a distinctive *brrrrr* fired directly at the shuttle. The shot went incredibly wide for a trained pilot and barely managed to hit one of the Z-95 escorts. The starfighter was hit just right on one of its engines however, and it banked to starboard, crashing into the shuttle, causing them both to explode in a vacuum.

"Unidentified vessel: big mistake. Prepare to die." The voice came over the comm before jamming all channels.

The remaining Z-95 juke to try and flank them, but BE was somehow able to pull off a sick drift which put Commander Xye directly in line for a clean shot, which he did, and made, and it was obviously awesome. Probably GOE material if the narrator is being modest.

That left them with ten other Z-95s headed their way however, and the two human pilots didn't have such a good feeling about getting that lucky again.

"I know what you're thinking, meatbags: we won't get that lucky again. Think again." BE said as he spun the ship around toward the incoming craft.

"I'm diverting all power to shields starting...now. Your shield technician exam officially begins as soon as we sustain fire."

"Oh sh-" Solohan again was about to speak as the LAAT began to get hammered by the full force of ten angry pirates.

Sirens went off almost immediately. Xye jumped from his gunner seat and nearly ran into Solohan as they both scrambled to look for the ship's shield array.

"I found it!" Xye called out, pointing to a tangle of wires.

"Pretty sure that's the PA system bud" Solohan put him down gently.

"Right. I knew that. It was extra credit."

"Sure. This is actually it," Solohan said, jumping into the actual work of attempting to repair the shields. The ship was quickly losing its shields as it sat there sustaining fire.

"Do I pull the red wire or the blue wire?" Solohan asked.

"What??"

"Just kidding. Here, if I reroute power from the air-conditioning, which is set at a very oddly high voltage by the way, I think I can actually sustain us for..."

A large blast shook the vessel as the lights went out briefly, before red auxiliary lights took their place.

"...for about thirty seconds after that shot." Solohan said.

"You have twenty seconds before complete craft annihilation." BE called to them over the comm.

Another large blast.

"Correction, fifteen."

"OK, I have an idea." Xye said to Solohan as he moved toward the cockpit. Xye pulls something out of his pocket and quickly attaches it to BE's neck port, who then also quickly powers down.

"I'm assuming control of the craft and we are getting the Darth out of here." Xye said, putting full power to engines as he began evasive maneuvers.

"Lieutenant I hope you can plot us a course for hyperspace back there, or we're as good as BE here soon!" Xye yelled to the back of the ship, becoming increasingly agitated and possibly sweating an excessive amount, may need to get that checked out.

"I can do that Commander, but I need you to buy me a little more time -"

One of the Z-95s was visible in the port-side doorway, which was simply open because of the LAAT's designed use for atmospheric flight. Xye looked over at BE, grabbed at the droid's right arm, and yanked it loose. BE really did need maintenance. Xye looked out the entryway where the Z-95 was nearly clipping them before he threw the droid's arm, praying to the Force or the Emperor's Spirit or whatever.

The Z-95 pilot clearly wasn't expecting a droid arm entering its engine, because once it did, the resulting explosion nearly took the LAAT with it.

"I have the jump calculated!" Solohan called out.

"Punch it!" Xye yelled out to no one but himself.

The LAAT started a hard jump through a dangerous route - Lieutenant Solohan had only briefly seen the coordinates written down on a scrap of paper near some Admiral's desk. Who even uses paper?

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Once the rough start of the hyperspace jump itself was over, the ship evened out into a smooth ride.

"Another happy hyperspace jump." Commander Xye said, starting to pour himself and the Lieutenant a drink from his regulation Chalquila flask, when suddenly they lurched out of hyperspace again.

Around them were many large vessels; several capitol ships at least, with a dozen corvettes and various other support craft, not to mention their starfighter compliments. A chime sounded over the LAAT's comms.

"Unidentified vessel, this is the New Republic. Identify yourselves immediately." Several X-Wing fighters left one of the larger ships' hangers as the message came through.

"Lieutenant." Xye looked at Solohan.

"Sir."

"Where did you get these coordinates?"

"They were just...sitting around, sir. I found them on some admiral's desk." Solohan said.

"Which Admiral?" Xye asked, the sweat again becoming an issue.

"I don't know - one of the guys who wears white? I think he's in the intelligence division; do you suppose that means he's part of the University staff?" Solohan asked.

Xye ran toward the cockpit comms.

"One moment, New Republic fleet. As you can tell this clanker has obviously seen better days. I'm looking for the...send identification button." Xye said while fumbling around with the object he had inserted into BE's neck, attempting to pull the thing out. He yanked at it with more force than was probably called for until it was free and BE-37 came back to life.

"...you now have five seconds," BE said, looking over at Xye, "Commander, where's my arm?"

"Listen. No questions," Xye said.

"I'm the one in charge here!" BE yelled back, attempting to hit Xye across the face, not remembering it was missing the appendage required to do so.

"Right, OK." Xye said, collecting himself.

"BE, sir. I would like to formally request you to plot us a course back to the fleet because we are in the middle of the Darthing New Republic fleet!" Xye said, pointing out the window at the obvious.

"I see the problem. Calculating now. I will require some time to calculate the several jumps required to throw them off."

"Just hurry!" Xye said.

"Unidentified vessel, I repeat, identify yourself and now additionally prepare to be boarded. Wait -" the comm broke out momentarily. "We have you on file. Republic Gunship Crescentrider, send your code clearance immediately. We were expecting you, but you're a little early." the comms resumed.

"Of course. We had a quick brunch, faster than normal with the...Admiral?" Xye said hopefully over the comm.

"Yes, of course, you Intelligence division guys are known for your extravagant brunches."

"Ha ha you know it," Xye said, motioning for Solohan to do something useful.

"Best I can do is the code I saw on a different Admiral's desk." Solohan told Xye.

A New Republic shuttle was rapidly approaching them, ion cannons clearly charged and set to fire on them.

"Sir, I have the jumps calculated when you are ready." BE said.

"Go! GO!" Xye yelled out.

"Sir, I feel this is not the best use of your shield technician training. I will reroute power to shields," BE said as Xye shut him off again.

"Did you get whatever codes he made?" Xye asked Solohan.

"Maybe. Probably. Better than the other option."

"Sith Darthit," Xye said as pulled a lever, rushing them into hyperspace again.

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The jump out of hyperspace didn't take long.

"MYNOCKS! Coming right at us! Head for the meme beam pod, Lieutenant!" Xye yelled out.



“Are you kidding me, where’s the escape pod on these things?!”

“So it’s treason then! Where’s my lightsaber?” Commander Xye shouted, grabbing at a ration stick next to him.

“I knew it would come down to this!” Solohan said, also grabbing for a tangle of wires next to him.

The two pilots stared each other down in the gunship’s open-walled design, waiting for the other one to make the first move. Commander Xye was clearly the more fit (and handsome) of the two, but Lieutenant Solohan certainly appeared to be able to handle himself in a fight.

Xye stabbed out with the ration stick at Solohan’s chest. The Lieutenant swiftly put an end to the encounter, knocking the wind out of Xye. Clearly bested, one would assume the fighting would stop, but Solohan instead began to strangle Xye with the tangle of cables he had been holding.

“This is for ruining my perfectly good night with a Wookiee you sack of beets,” Solohan said, pretty aggressively if you ask me.

A metallic sound came from behind them both.

“Sirs, I wish to inform you - “ BE said, somehow reactivated.

Xye took the initiative from the disruption and rolled Solohan over, pinning him down and turning the tide. Xye snapped at BE: “Not now, golden-rod! Shut him up or shut him down, Lieutenant!”

“I don’t think he’s gold, sir, he’s more of a...violet? No, green? Wait, how are you changing colors like that?” Solohan said, struggling.

“Sirs, this is part of the exam. I am taking full control of the vessel.”

“But the mynocks!” The pilots yell out in unison.

“Sirs. My visuals and literally anyone in the hanger can inform you there are no indications of mynocks on the scanners.”

“The hanger?” Xye asked, standing up, noticing he had been on top of the Lieutenant a potentially uncomfortable length of time.

“Are you nuts?” Solohan said more than asked the droid.

"I have a few bolts, sir, but that's irrelevant."

"What the hell is going on, man?" Xye asked, shaking the droid, who was still missing his limb.

"Sirs. This vessel never left the Hammer. The craft never even started up. It is in such a state of disrepair I don't believe a single circuit works." BE said.

"Wait...What did you have for breakfast this morning Lieutenant?" Xye asked Solohan.

"Some standard rations, but I did have some weird fermented beet-juice thing with it." Solohan said.

"You son of a-" Was the last thing Commander Xye was able to say before BE-37 administered a healthy dose of tranquilizer to both pilots.

They had successfully passed the test, BE thought. They may not remember it, sure, but that's to be expected from the mildly hallucinogenic properties of his BE-37 Special. They will both make fine radar technicians for the Hammer. Or shield technicians, whatever.

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Aboard the Hammer, BE-37 stands anxiously in front of Major Genie's desk.

"Sir, are you happy with the outcome of the story?" BE-37 asked the Major.

"Well. It certainly has excitement. It has tension. It has an exploration of feelings I felt could have been explored a bit more, but that's OK, maybe next time eh?" Major Genie told the droid.

BE, clearly crushed by the slightest amount of criticism, took the datapad back from the Major.

"Maybe next time, sir. Maybe next time."

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