

A LIFE AT WAR: TWILIGHT

Chapter 11: The right honorable business of Piracy

We had exited hyperspace a couple hours ago into the solar system of Drongar. The barely inhabited planet had been caught in the orbit of an isolated star a couple millennia ago and had been deemed acceptable for a couple thousand settlers sick of government oversight to colonize. It didn't have the population or the willingness to join the Republic and it didn't want to join the Separatists either.

Command had wanted us to deploy sensor buoys in the area since the war began, but there hadn't been a good opportunity to do so until now. However thanks to the detour we would be approaching our next target of Toola from an unusual point of entry. We should be catching the Seps from behind and if their sensors were focusing from where any Republic force should be coming from, we'd be dropping on them none the wiser.

Until then however we were performing maintenance and refueling the Y-wings, as well as getting the men their last chance of a good rest for at least a week or two. It was also allowing the remnants of Hope company to be re-deployed to their respective ships. In fact I was expecting Clone Captain Chain in my office any moment now for his after action report.

I had already browsed through its, no his, original report, but I wanted to ensure the severity of the casualties would not repeat itself in any future engagements. It would not do to cost the taxpayer more credits after all. This war was already looking to be more expensive than originally anticipated and I didn't want to be the idiot who got an entire company killed through avoidable blunders.

I take another sip from my cup of caff as R4 quietly played an older workers march from Fondor, I was feeling a tad homesick and R4 was starting to mother me more. Was it to lift my spirits maybe? It wasn't very clear to me, but I suppose it helps a bit. Though I'd eat my boots before admitting that to the droid. I had even removed my cap from my head, like the people did back home when eating or drinking anything to try and fight that damnable longing in my chest.

About a minute later I hear a knock on my door and I open it remotely from my desk. The clone is standing there, helmet wedged between his right arm and side. I place my cup down and gesture for him to come in. I return my cap to my head as the clone begins to move, then move the cup further to the side. With a quick gesture R4 to cuts the music so we could get to business. The clone salutes before standing at attention, his eyes not even looking down at me from where he stood.

“At ease, you may sit if you wish clone.” I begin, my hand grabbing the datapad R4 was handing to me.

“Thank you, sir.” The clone says before sitting down across from me. He places his helmet on his lap as he stares at my face. Honestly it kinda surprised me that he hadn’t done anything with his face or hair to differentiate himself from the others, except for a small faded scar between his right eye and ear.

I turn to his report as I begin talking: “So, I will begin rather simply. The objective was secured in an exemplary timeframe with no losses sustained among the Navy arms-men. None of the vehicles were lost in the engagement and there was a mere twenty percent casualty rate for clone company Hope, excellent job.”

“I don’t think it was, sir.” Comes the interruption. I glance up at the clone, he is looking tense, like a mudpuppy about to charge at a foe he cannot beat, but sure as hell can bloody. He continues before I can say otherwise, “Twenty nine of my brothers died, sir. We were unable to retrieve any of them either, sir. I do not believe it was acceptable ... sir.”

“Well then, that brings me to my next point, what supplies could make such a mission easier or more survivable for your men in the future?”

“Sir?”

“I don’t want to waste taxpayer credits or deal with the logistics of getting more soldiers for surface landings or boarding actions if I can help it. So Captain Chain, I am open to ideas.” I state.

The clone is processing the information, like a droid when asked to do a series of tasks in the most efficient way possible. He moves to speak before stopping himself. Half a minute passes while he thinks on what he wishes to say, I use this time to re-read the intelligence briefing on Toola for the tenth time since the raid had begun being planned.

“Extra armor, sir. Maybe a couple more LAATs and a faster reaction of air support if possible, sir.”

I pause a moment to mull it over: “More armor may be feasible for the next campaign, though it would limit the ration quality, because I will not jeopardize the amount of time the rations last us. We will not be able to fit more LAATs into the section at this time, we’re already over capacity with Bastard and Little Squadrons for the hangar bay, I was surprised we even managed to fit two LAATs into there in the first place. I will not, however infringe on air support regulations, they are for your and their safety.”

"I understand, sir. Thank you, sir." Comes the monotonous reply.

"I am sorry, but unless high command expands the section with a carrier or another Dreadnought class, we will be unable to increase the LAATs available to you. Though I assure you your requests are being taken under advisement and will be acted upon once our situation changes. Anything else?"

"Paints, sir." The clone says.

"Excuse me?"

"Paints, sir. The men want to begin painting their armor. Preferably black and a grayish blue, for space and the lakes of the first planet we fought on, sir."

I take a moment to mull it over. The rank colors had been discontinued a bit ago, but since the clones were a separate detachment I don't think they explicitly should be carrying legion colors at all. On the other hand, it would help them distinguish themselves and probably increase their morale. I may even be able to have them share the paints so I could more easily distinguish the Navy arms-men from their ships of origin. Maybe copy some of Fondor's style with armbands. Worth considering if nothing else.

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“Alright, I will put in a request for all the feasible acquisitions you wished for. However I want a guarantee your men will not paint anything vulgar or against regulations on their armor.”

“Of course, sir. I will look over every design myself.” The clone replies, a smile creeping onto his face.

“Well then I suppose we’re do-” I am interrupted by an urgent comm notification. I don’t hesitate and answer it. The voice of Sergeant Slas comes through: “*Sir, sensors are reporting multiple ships exiting hyperspace within the minute.*”

It takes a second to process the information, another to make my decision: “Call the bridge crew together, I don’t care what they’re doing get them together. I want the fleet on red alert, notify the other Captains and prepare for battle.” I get up from my desk and usher Captain Chain to follow me out of my office, “I want Bastard squadron out and combat ready asap and I want Little Squadron to rendezvous with the Lucky Kelp and Dagger. Call those two back

from deploying the buoys, I want to show no exploitable gaps if possible. I and Captain Chain will be on the bridge imminently.”

The alarms blare and the hallways are shaded in red as we run to the bridge, meeting up with other bridge crew as we head for the door, the occasional group of crew running in our opposite direction. All usual decorum forgotten, no salutes exchanged, no polite nods returned, simply action and the adrenaline of an imminent engagement. The doors to the bridge open and people rush past me as I slow to a fast walk, allowing the crew to their stations and giving them time to read in before I call on anyone. As I glance around the bridge I see some without caps, others in their undershirts, a couple in sleepwear and one in only his pants and shoes. Undignified usually, but in a sudden call for the full bridge crew, fully acceptable.

“Report!” I bark out.

“Sir, a trio of Corona class frigates have entered the system and are approaching Drongar at a leisurely pace. They either haven’t spotted us, or are merchant ships.” Starts Lieutenant Mi-Kus, his usual calm diminished by his lack of shoes, socks and officers cap.

“Little Squadron has begun escorting Lucky Kelp and Dagger back to us. All ships report readiness within the minute.” Reports Slas.

“We’re lagging behind a bit, sir. Bastard Squadron is in the middle of refueling. Can deploy, but they’ll have half the range and battle time, our weapons also need about two minutes until ready.” Comes the bare chested engineering Adjutant.

“Bring us on an interception course, wait to hail them until we’re in turbolaser range, I want any possible identifications on those ships found and researched a minute ago. Helmsman bring us about half speed. Deploy Bastard Squadron at my mark.” I order.

We approach the ships rapidly, the Prince’s Duty and Buckler moving to escort positions as the other Republic frigates and Little Squadron move to rejoin the fleet. As the trio of Republic ships close the distance on the three unidentified frigates a transmission is picked up.

“Unidentified ships hailing us, sir.” Sargent Slas says.

“Put me through,” a nod as the tactical display shifts to static, “Unidentified vessels, you have entered a restricted zone under Republic Navy control, identify yourselves immediately or be fired upon. I repeat, you are in a restricted zone, identify yourselves or be fired upon.”

A moment passes, before a voice answers, it is full of confidence and assuredly not from the core or colonies: *“Ah, we are simple merchants, looking for safe harbor on Drongar. This war she is bad for business my friend, we have suffered a ... minor setback recently and are in need of repairs.”*

“Sir,” the a voice calls from the bridge, “One of the vessels appears to have the Ohnaka Gang’s markings.”

“Get me everything we have on them that may be relevant.” I bark before motioning for me to be put through again, “Unidentified merchant vessels, transmit your identification codes or be seen as hostile and be fired upon.”

“Sir, they recently attempted to ransom Count Dooku, Jedi Generals Skywalker and Kenobi to the Republic about a week ago, after successfully capturing all three. They are lead by a Hondo Ohnaka, are almost entirely Weequay and from reports are decently well armed.” Comes my update.

“Transmitting codes now, my friend. Do you know how long this will take, we are in need of repairs and refueling.” The transmission pipes up again.

“Put the codes through, shields to front, ready a volley, target their engines, but wait for my command, pass that along to the other ships. Lieutenant Mi-Kus, pull up regulations on letters of marque, I want as many options available to me as possible. Captain Chain, prepare a boarding party for each ship, I recommend caution.” I begin, an idea or two starting to coalesce in my mind. I get a few confused looks, but the men and women follow my orders.

“Sir, the codes are not registered for Corona class frigates, two are registered for CR70 corvettes and one for a Neutron Star. All have been deemed lost for at least a month.”

“Thank you,” I turn and motion for me to be put through again, the other Republic frigates have joined up with us by now and we form a line across from the pirates. I receive an affirmation from Sergeant Slas and begin to speak: “Identified vessels, we are under the belief, that these codes do not belong to you. You have been identified as members of an illegal pirate gang, involved in the capture of two Republic military officers and the assault on the negotiators sent to ransom them from you. You have escaped Republic capture repeatedly and assaulted civilian transports, this is your last chance, lower your shields and prepare for boarding or be fired upon.”

“Wait wait wait, my friend, this is a misunderstanding.” Comes the voice from the holoprojector.

“Lower your shields and prepare to be boarded.” I say again.

“Wait, maybe we can cut a deal, yes?” Comes the voice once more.

“Pirate, Hondo Ohnaka this is your last warning, lower your shields and prepare for boarding, you are outgunned, outclassed and outmaneuvered. I doubt there is anything you could offer us.” I counter, slowly getting bored of this.

The holoprojector shifts from its static to depicting a one to one scale of a Weequay in light blue. He is wearing goggles, a turtle shell like helmet and an unbuttoned trench coat. The self proclaimed pirate king speaks, before I can get a word in: *“Information. I have information from many nearby systems. All I want in turn for this quality, nay **vital**, information is that you let me and my men leave unmolested by your very big and violent ships.”*

I pause for a moment, notion for myself to be muted again before speaking: “Mi-Kus, I want the rules for handing out letters of marque summarized, Slas, I want a rough picture of what the other Captains think of this.”

Mi-Kus starts: “You have the authority to give out a letter of marque, if it seems practical for the greater war effort. Mainly through technicality, since

we are an independent task-force, but it has held up in military court before during the last Sith War. AT least according to our records.”

“Good job.” I reply.

“Captain Endat is recommending destroying them, Captain Sicato is interested in the possible intelligence and Captains Lix and Strom are worried about our position being leaked, all have defaulted to your decision, sir.”

“Well that makes this easier. Put me back on.” I pause a moment to think. I wanted this information. It could very easily be more up to date than Republic intelligence. The nagging paranoia against High Command was also pushing me for more intelligence on the prospective targets of the 347th. Finally I made my choice and continued speaking with the pirate, “Hondo Ohnaka you will give us the most up to date information you have on the following systems and planets, Toola, Raxus Prime and Secundus, Dellalt, Iego, Makem Te, Quermia, Deservo, Lianna and Sembla, a written report will suffice, until then none of your ships will move. Am I understood?”

“Yes of course, I will have my men get to it right away.” The pirate replies.

“To ensure the quality of your information, I am willing to grant you a letter of marque and reprisal for any and all Separatist vessel if and only if your

information proves to be valid, if not you will not be granted such ... lenience again." I say, a bloodthirsty smile showing on my face.

"Ah, yes I shall ask my men to ... ensure their memory is true then, a moment please."

The video cuts out and I wipe the smile from my face. Pirates need more stick than carrot, but a meaningless piece of data may guarantee the value of the information.

"Have the guns strayed from their targets?" I ask to the tension filled bridge.

"No sir, the pirates haven't left their original positions." Comes the reply.

"Good, maybe he isn't as stupid as he appears." Mi-Kus says.

Another handful of minutes pass until Sergeant Slas speaks up: "Incoming transmission, it appears to be a mix of ships logs and testimonials."

“Alright, hail the pirates.” I pause a moment until Hondo reappears in front of me, “We have received your information. You are permitted to land on the world, as long as there is no pillaging, looting, or other synonyms for theft by your men. You will remain there, without communications, until your sensors detect my ships leaving the system. If your information proves true I will have the letter of marque transferred to your person in one month’s time by a couple ships from my command in this system. Have a good day pirate.”

I nod to Slas, who cuts off the transmission before the self proclaimed pirate king can retort.

“Someone inform Captain Chain we no longer need the boarding parties, but hold off on returning the section to the adjusted schedule until Ohnaka and his gang have landed on Drongar.”

I receive a flurry of nods as the three pirate ships head towards the world. I hope this was the right decision and I hope I didn’t somehow just sign my warrant for a court martial.