

A LIFE AT WAR: TWILIGHT

Chapter 12: Check at Toola

After reviewing the intelligence provided by the self proclaimed Pirate Prince we had to modify our schedule a bit. We would still hit all our major targets, but there would be no convoy raiding while out and about. The Separatists had tightened their security patrols around military convoys and civilian shipping. That also meant pushing our engagements closer together with less time for repairs or much rest between said engagements.

We finished setting up sensor buoys around Drongar before leaving system, about sixteen hours of hyperspace travel combined with an extra hour of adjustments on the rarely traveled route between Drongar and Toola. On our last adjustment the section went over the final preparations. Refueling the Y-wings for the second time during the voyage to Toola, making last systems checks on the ships and briefing the crew of the known specifics of our target.

It was a modified core ship. Hardly any weapons systems, poor shielding, a menagerie of sensors focused on the Perlimian Trade Route and the vessels entering and exiting the Raxus system. The point of its destruction would be to obscure our movements and hopefully make our eventual return to Dac easier.

And so we entered hyperspace for the last time on our route to Toola.

“Exiting in three, two, one.” Comes the usual call from the helmsman.

Hyperspace dissipates as the Republic task-force returns to realspace. As usual the Little Revenge had taken point, the duet of MC30c s to either side, the Buckler to the starboard of the Lucky Kelp, the Dagger on portside of the Prince’s Duty, Bastard squadron nestled in the gravitational shadow of the Little Revenge.

“Sensors picking sensor station up ahead, it is closer to the local asteroid belt than we’d thought.” Comes a status update.

“Attempt to jam hostile communications. All ships, all ahead full, launch all fighters and prepare for combat. I hereby advise all captains to be wary of the asteroids, keep your shields spread out. I’d rather have a lowered rate of fire than a floating hulk of ship.” I order, my left hand beginning to tap on the holstered slugthrower as I study the holoprojected map of the system.

The Republic ships race forwards towards the asteroid belt, hoping to destroy the installation and get out before any Separatists arrive. Halfway there and a

swarm of Vulture droids exit the hangar space of the modified core ship. They quickly follow their programming and assemble into their formation, racing along an interception course.

“Inform Captain Strom he is to take point with Little Squadron. They are to intercept the enemy Vulture droids and keep them off of us. Bastard Squadron, keep close to the Little Revenge.” I command, my eyes gazing over the tactical display as the red enemy fighters race towards my ships.

“Enemy fighters in turbolaser range, sir.” I hear.

“Give them a couple volleys, all frigates follow my lead. Helmsman bring us down two hundred meters and switch to flank speed, give the fighters and the Buckler a chance for their dogfight while we blaze ahead.”

As my orders are carried out I give glare at the tactical display. The primary weakness of the current section was the lack of anti fighter capability, so I was leaving the mixed clone and volunteer fighter squadron to battle alongside the Buckler and hope their combined firepower would overwhelm the two dozen or so enemy fighters.

“Confirmed hits by turbolaser flak, enemy swarm down three.” I hear, my eyes not leaving the tactical display.

“We’ve reached new plane.” I hear from the Helmsman.

“Continue forwards, back to all ahead full. I want Bastard squadron under us, hopefully the enemy will continue to be unaware of their presence.” I say.

A minute later we are in range of the sensor station, our fighters and the Buckler have been rather successful. Six more vultures down, with Little Six and Three gone in turn.

“All ships open fire, prioritize enemy communications, I want no more ugly surprises this fight.”

A salvo of turbolasers emerge from the Republic frigates and cruiser, all racing towards the spherical vessel nestled near the asteroid belt. A moment later they smash into the shields of the Separatist vessel. Only a handful of lasers emerge in turn from the Core ship, one hitting the Little Revenge, causing her shields to shudder. Though luckily it looks like that was the only hit so far.

“Report from Buckler. Enemy swarm clearing out, they’re down to two vultures, we’ve lost Little Eleven, Nine and Four.” Comes a status update from Slas.

“Have Little Squadron return to the hangar bay once they’ve mopped up the remaining two vultures, I want them fully re-armed, refueled and repaired. Inform Captain Strom he is to rendezvous with us at the same time.”

Finally the red vultures blip out of existence on the holoprojected map, as more and more lasers crash into the failing shields of the core ship. I turn away from the display and look out of the windows. Finally the enemy shields shutter and go down, and two salvos of missiles emerge from the MC30c frigates and smash into the Separatist ship a moment later. The sustained bombardment continues to pummel into the core ship for maybe half a minute until something interrupts my observation.

“Sir, we’re detecting multiple vessels about to emerge from hyperspace!”

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“Redeploy Little Squadron, once they’ve finished up. I want the Prince’s Duty, the Buckler and Bastard Squadron to follow our lead towards the unidentified

enemy formation. Firing a volley or two at our objective as we do so. Keep speed nominal and get me a better reading!" I bark.

As the four Republic ships break off, the Separatist ships enter system. It takes another moment until they are identified. Four Munificents, all racing towards our formation.

"Keep Bastard Squadron and Little Squadron below us until I order otherwise. Have our ships focus fire on the lead cruiser, We have a fighter advantage, and I want them to be unable to see it until we're on top of them. Shields to front, all ahead full." I command, the orders getting relayed to the other ships as we accelerate towards the enemy ships.

Three frigates and a heavy cruiser against four cruisers are usually about less than even odds. If I'd had more time to prepare I could see myself winning this more easily. Ugh, no point in wasting time with what ifs. We knew the risk thanks to Hondo, but I was expecting the enemy response to take longer, or at the very least be smaller in size.

"Enemy fire incoming." Comes the report from the sensors officer.

One of the heavy turbolaser blasts impact the Little Revenge causing the shields to shudder through the strain. Another blast impacts the Prince's Duty

causing a similar reaction. The other two miss the mark, racing off into the depths of space. My eyes close in on the tactical display as another volley of enemy fire approaches us. Almost in range. The enemy fire is again sporadic. One blast impacts the Prince's Duty, another the Dagger, the third barely misses the Little Revenge and the fourth sails past the formation.

Now.

"OPEN FIRE!" I below.

Almost immediately a salvo of turbolasers emerge from the prow of the Little Revenge, joined shortly after by a salvo from the Dagger's Ion cannons. The first Republic volley smashes into the lead Munificent. The Separatists fire off another salvo of turbolaser fire in return. The heavy blasts soon joined by the lighter turbolasers of the Munificents.

The enemy ordnance races towards the second Republic salvo, the reds and blues passing one another, before smashing into their respective foes' vessels. Another heavy turbolaser impacts the Prince's Duty, causing the heavy duty shields of the Mon Cala vessel to finally shudder in defeat, the next light turbolaser impacting seamlessly onto the armor of the ship.

“Bring us in close. Helmsman adjust our course to have us between the second lead and the vessel furthest on the right flank. I want the Dagger and Prince’s Duty to continue the bombardment of the lead Munificent, before-” the impact of multiple turbolaser blasts cause the ship to shudder, as the shields start to lose effectiveness, “-Before focusing on the second lead ship. Bring our fighters and bombers to bear. I want a bombing run on the ship furthest on the left flank. Spread the shields out and brace in case of shield failure.” I order.

Almost instantaneously the fighters and bombers emerge from under the Little Revenge and begin to race forward, their pilots putting the pedal to the metal. One Unlucky Y-wing is hit by a turbolaser heading towards the Little Revenge and explodes in a ball of fire and metal. The Dagger goes above us as we continue forward, taking another heavy turbolaser blast to our near failing shields, causing myself to lose balance and almost fall onto R4.

“Sir, lead Munificent has started drifting. Primary and secondary bridges appear to be down, their return fire is sporadic at best.” I hear.

“Inform The Dagger and Prince’s Duty to move onto their next target. Bring up ship display.” I order in turn. My eyes looking through the windows and focusing on the space between the two Munificents we were rapidly approaching.

“The sensor station is down.” Sargent Slas informs me.

“Have them join us asap. Cut our speed, put more power into the shields and fire at will.” I bellow out as we enter between the two ships. I start staring at the ship display, watching for any damage.

The port and starboard turbolasers and lasercannons fully join the fray as they open broadsides into the Separatist cruisers. Multiple blasts of blue fire emerging from the Dreadnought as they impact the two ships. Then the shields shutter one final time before the returning enemy fire impacts the hull. I almost fall again, though R4 catches me in time. In a moment like this it is a test of endurance between the ships. No fancy maneuvers, no clever tactics, simply a brawl between ships and the communication of bridge officers.

“Hull breach near the secondary power generator.”

“Port battery C is down, all lost.”

“Enemy ships taking as well as they’re giving, sir.”

“Starboard Munificent is going down, Prince’s Duty claims reactor hit.”

“Redirect them to the left flank.” I order in turn, another shake disturbing my observation of the holoprojected image of the Little Revenge.

“Further hull breaches by the crew quarters and engine 3 is down!” Someone shouts.

“Prince’s Duty reports multiple hull breaches and weapons failures, they’re requesting orders to pull back.” I hear Sergeant Slas say.

“Granted.” I say in turn, Another shock along the ship, causing a couple crew members to loose their footing.

A large explosion to our portside makes me look over the tactical display for any new indications of damage.

“The Lucky Kelp and Buckler have joined us, sir!” I hear.

“Swap to tactical display.” I bark.

A couple seconds later I can see the entire tactical display. The Buckler and Lucky Kelp had joined us in bombarding the exploding Munificent, while on the other Separatist vessels were already drifting through space, clearly also incapacitated.

“That was too close for comfort.” I mutter, unable to keep the thought for myself.

“Sir, Prince’s Duty is reporting a minor reactor leak.” Mi-Kus says.

“See if they can get a temporary patch on it until we’re no longer in inhabited space.” I request.

“They say they can shut the leaking reactor off for one jump, but they’ll need long term repairs then.”

“Alright then, all ships get in formation. We head to a point three minutes hyperspace away. Navigations will send coordinates imminently. Once there we’ll get any possible repairs done and see what’s left then.”

It takes an agonizing fifteen minutes until the formation dips into hyperspace.

Once we re-emerge from hyperspace the section finds itself in the void. Sure, you can see the stars, but there is nothing of note in the area, no suns, planets, asteroids, comets, nothing. Simply the void of space. I didn't let it distract me though, instead we started taking stock of the taskforce to see how bad the damage really was.

The Little Revenge was limping, well, not really, but she was slower than usual. One engine was down, and a minor fuel leak was not helping our situation. The Prince's Duty was even worse off. The artisan warship was missing a quarter of her armor plates, leaving many compartments exposed and her secondary reactor leaking radiation and fuel into the void. Her primary shield generator had also been sniped off by a lucky shot. The Dagger meanwhile was holding up pretty well, only a couple scorch marks on her armor.

The Lucky Kelp and Buckler were in pristine condition. A quick status update from Bastard and Little Squadrons told me we were down to ten Y-Wings and five V-19 Torrents. Though an upside of this was that we could almost house the entire fighter and bomber detachment in the Little Revenge now, though it was not a great comfort to any of the remaining pilots.

I called up the other Captains in the section for my next orders.

“Alright, I want the Prince’s Duty to head back to Mon Cala for repairs. She’ll be escorted by the Buckler for safety and emergency evacuation relief, make sure to transfer any superfluous cargo from both ship into the other ships in the section. The rest of us will make as many repairs as possible within the next six hours, after that we’re heading for our next target. Any questions?”

There is a moment of pause until Captain Strom speaks: *“Sir, with the casualties sustained by Little Squadron, wouldn’t it be more prudent for the Buckler to remain as anti-fighter support?”*

“We will be engaging enemy stations from here on out. We will need the extra firepower. I trust in the remaining fighter pilots to keep us safe alongside the point defense of the Dagger and lasers of the Lucky Kelp to hold off any fighter presence the Separatists may have.” I say in turn.

“Maybe we should all head back now, sir. It would allow the Little Revenge to operate at full capacity instead of only what the repairs would patch up.” I hear from Luis.

“I will not turn this operation back, until the stated targets are either unattainable or destroyed. Any other questions?” I ask.

“Sir, would it be possible for the rest period to be extended, doubled maybe, to ensure the repairs are less patchwork and more ... safe. It would not be prudent, I would think, for our previous damage to rear its ugly head during the next firefight.” Captain Endat suggests.

I consider it for a moment before answering: “Alright, twelve hours of repairs here, then we return to our objectives. That will be all, dismissed.”

One by one the Captains’ holograms disappear leaving me on the bridge, surrounded by the other officers, hurrying about their duties. Next Target would be the stations at Quermia and Makem Te.