

A LIFE AT WAR: TWILIGHT

Chapter 15: Duel at Drongar

The new clones had arrived and started to assimilate into their new squads. Captain Chain had informed me the paint the clones had requested had also arrived with them. I was unsure how, since my formal resupply and acquisition requests still haven't, but I didn't bother asking and I don't plan on telling on them either. The clones were too happy to rain on their parade, even if it meant I would have to wait another week or three for my next shipment of credits, durasteel plates and ration packs.

I had also finished up the formal Letter of Marque and had dealt with the debrief for my officers. It was relatively simple the almost fully repaired Little Revenge, a couple armor plates needed to be replaced before our next engagement, would head to Drongar through Munto Codru. From Intelligence reports it seemed the Separatists had abandoned any plans for any installation in the Munto Codru system for the imminent future. Which was fine by me, I had enough to worry about with Mintooine and Pammant nearby and had no interest in repeatedly fighting north of Ruisto.

So, we moved away from the shipyards of Dac, the two Y-wings and the V-19 escorted us to the edge of the system before breaking off and returning to the

resting section. I didn't think we'd need them and in such low numbers it seemed a waste of fuel to bring them along.

"Helmsman, are we in position?" I ask.

"Yes, sir." They respond.

"Wonderful. Navigator jump at your leisure." I say, a calm overtaking me.

A moment later we were once again embraced by the blue and white swirling of hyperspace.

We enter the Drongar system without much fanfare. The buoys were pleasantly silent, continuing to send the all clear signal. The system was relatively isolated, which was good for the locals. Seasonal routes limited the system to one safe year round entry and exit point. For that alone, It would be a shame to bring the war here, any peace was worth protecting. Though I suppose we were breaking that very peace now, even if it was primarily to protect them. I suppose it was all a matter of perspective.

"How much longer until we can expect Ohnaka?" I ask.

“Well, sir,” Mi-Kus begins, “you gave him an entire day to show up and we are about two hours ahead of said day.”

I almost roll my eyes at the poorly hidden sarcasm. I suppose it was not the worst thing possible that the crew was growing accustomed to me. I tap the holster on my hip then slightly nudge my officers badge, ensuring it was correctly positioned.

Then the waiting. I eventually started dismissing a handful of the bridge crew, those who would be needed for a later shifts, such as Mi-Kus and Slas and a handful of superfluous members such as the Adjutant Helmsman and the second Engineering Adjutant. In the end there were maybe a third of the full bridge crew on the very bridge they crewed.

I myself sat down and took the position of the sensors officer to keep an eye on the buoy and to quickly get the rest of the bridge crew back whenever Hondo decided to grace us with his presence. Honestly it was a bit of a surprise when I got a reading for a capital ship. Unless Hondo had suddenly reversed his fortunes this was an enemy ship.

“R4 emergency broadcast through the ship, ready? Thank you. ATTENTION ALL CREW BATTLESTATIONS, POSSIBLE HOSTILE INCOMING, THIS IS

NOT A DRILL, I REPEAT UNIDENTIFIED SHIP APPROACHING, BATTLESTATIONS! THIS IS NOT A DRILL. Sound the klaxons, bring the shields up, bring us about, one hundred degrees starboard. Bring up the tactical display. Give a distress call to the 347th and any other Republic allies in the sector.” I begin to order about.

The bridge was slowly filling up with her officers and crew, a couple in casual attire, or sleepwear. We had come about and some two thirds of the bridge crew at their stations when the capital ship exited hyperspace.

“Sir, hostile Recusant class light destroyer. They’re approaching rapidly.” I hear Mi-Kus say.

I rapidly recall my last briefing on Separatist warships. Recusant light destroyer, twice the length of a Dreadnought, a capital ship with the armaments to prove it. Limited crew, aggressive droid brain, usually commanded by the droid brain itself. Extra armor plating on primary superstructure, exposed between engines and primary superstructure.

“Bring us alongside her. Fire at will.” I bark.

The two ships race towards one another, unleashing volleys of red and blue turbolaser fire. The shields of both ships shuddering under the impacts. As the

two warships get closer they slow down and come alongside one another to properly exchange in broadsides. The first of such broadsides emerging from the Little Revenge and bracketing the area around the Separatist bridge, though the shields absorb most of the damage.

“Helmsman try and get us an angle on the enemy engine block. Have our fore portside turbolasers prepare to put as much into the weakpoint between the engines and the rest of the ship as possible, as long as they have a clear shot.” I say, as another enemy volley impacts our shields.

“Shields down to twenty odd percent, sir!” I hear from the engineering representative.

“Redirect power to shields! Focus on the engaging side.” I bark as another Separatist volley impacts the shields.

The Recusant is taking the turbolaser fire better than we are. Even with some shields failing its armor is holding up to our punishing bombardment. A final shudder and the shields around the Little Revenge fail. Another volley exchange destroying a two turbolaser batteries on the Recusant and demolishing the hangar bay of the Little Revenge.

“Sir enemy ship has us in a tractor beam!”

“HELMSMAN, ALL AHEAD FULL, BRACE FOR IMPACT!” I shout.

The sudden jolt in forward acceleration combined with the tractor beam pulls us closer to the Recusant, but further back with us almost having an angle on her weak-point. The Little Revenge comes to a halt, turbolasers still firing at the Recusant, breaking through some of the Hull and smashing into the belly of the beast. The Recusant extends a docking port towards our own. It crashes into our hull like a punch to the gut.

“They’re boarding us. Lieutenant, you have the bridge. I recommend, holding fire, but the call is yours. Get a party to meet them at the docking port. I plan on shoving them out the airlock myself.” I say, pulling my ancestral slugthrower from my holster, while rushing out of the bridge.

I gesture for two clones to join me as the klaxons screams and the entire ship is bathed in red warning lights. We rush down the hall, gathering up clones and arms-men as we go. We hear the blasterfire before we see any droids. We reach a barricade of cargo boxes and upturned desks, manned by two clones and a midshipmen.

“Status, soldiers.” I bark.

“Captain Chain, had us hold this position while he and 1st platoon intercept the droids.” The midshipman replies.

“Good, I’m leaving a further three men here, have any reinforcements stay here, unless otherwise ordered.” I say, while picking out a further three arms-men. I receive a nod from the midshipman, then have the remaining thirty clones and arms-men join me over the barricade.

We turn a hallway and are greeted by the mayhem. A dozen clones lying on the ground, while a column of B2 battledroids, two across march slowly forward. I quickly throw myself to the side, and am joined by the majority of the men following me, although I hear three of them fall to the ground.

I take aim, fire the slugthrower with a familiar crack and watch a B2 fall to the ground, the slug impacting it in the kneecap and embedding it the next droid’s foot. Another crack and a different B2 falls to the floor, a smoldering hole right in it’s forehead.

“KEEP FIRING!-” I shout- “PUSH THEM BACK!”

Another crack and a hole emerges on a B2's chest, slowing it, until a blasterbolt puts it down. We're holding up well. If only we had time for a barricade here, it would be even easier. I'll revisit that later. Another crack and another droid falls to the ground.

Unauthorized use: this story is on Amazon without permission from the author. Report any sightings.

The droids are slowly getting closer despite our best efforts. I fire off another four rounds before reloading the ancient slugthrower's magazine with a clip, pocketing the piece of metal before unloading two more slugs into the advancing droids, causing one droid to fall, trip another and felling a third.

I feel someone crash into the wall next to me. I spare the clone a glance before realizing it was Captain Chain. I turned back and fired off another slug with a crack. It went right through a B2's arm, exploding the blaster cartridge causing the droid and two of its compatriots to be engulfed by the flame.

"While I am impressed by your shooting skills, sir. Why are you not on the bridge!?" I hear Captain Chain shout, while he continues to unload his blaster into the droids.

I fire off another round which embeds itself in a B2, making it stumble, though it shrugs it off and continues forward. I duck back behind the limited cover before answering: "Well, Captain, I suppose I was insulted by some pompous droid-brain thinking it could take my ship, without my personal response. Mi-Kus has the bridge, I trust my second on this ship."

I see another clone being thrown off his feet as his chest is impacted by a handful of blasterbolts. Chain flinches back a bit, before responding: "Sir, we have this under control, I recommend you return to the bridge and organize the defense there."

"All due respect Captain, but I plan on holding my current position until the enemy is dead or the position is untenable. I believe we can hold out here for another three minutes, longer if the B2s are replaced by lesser droids." I say. I lean out to take a shot, but hop back when a blasterbolt barely misses my head.

"Sir, my professional opinion, is that we cannot last longer than a minute, so either you join us in the retreat or I'll carry you back to the secondary line." the Clone threatens.

I glance back at the droids and with a considerate amount of frustration realize the Captain is right. I nod at him, my face grim. He says something into his helmet comm then grabs me by the arm and we rush out of the hallway with

the remaining sixteen clones and seven arms-men. I glance around and see a further seven clones and eleven arms-men covering us.

I grab my commlink, punch in my bridge override and shout into it: "CLOSE BLASTDOORS STARBOARD DOCKING THREE AND FOUR!"

The clones and arms-men move further back as the further blastdoor closes, leaving three B2s isolated. They're gunned down by the time the second blastdoor closes.

"There that should buy us time. I want multiple barricades around here, I want equal division between defense of the reactor and the bridge. Any arms-man here should equip their re-breather in case we need to vent a section due to fire or tactical necessity. Captain Chain, You will be placed in charge of the reactor defenses I will take the bridge defenses. Any questions? No? Then get to work!" I order.

I glance at the blastdoor, still locked and it should take a while for the Separatists to break through both of them. I reload my slugthrower and sort through my racing mind. I finally nod and start giving out orders: "I want a light barricade at an angle to the door, it will be a risky position to hold, but it might do more damage this way. I want eleven volunteers for it. Next the barricade down the hall, will be the fallback position. I want it improved. The armory is on this side, so get an e-web on that barricade as well. After that we'll form a

final barricade outside the armory, as heavy as possible. We'll set up two more e-webs there and set up a temporary medical station between the armory and bridge. HOP TO IT!"

My orders are carried out and I move back towards the bridge. Captain chain requests an e-web as well and I acquiesce, having three clones run it over to him. I enter the bridge and nod at Mi-Kus as I return to the tactical display.

"Any idea why they're boarding us?" I ask.

"We presume information, sir. It would be easier to take in our intel from the bridge, than scour it from the wreckage." Mi-Kus responds.

"Fair enough, have you enacted Castle Protocols?" I ask.

"All elevators have been locked in place, crew have been issued blasters and been authorized to use them. The crew is forming up as reserves in their respective crew quarters, the armory and the reactor. We would have assembled the hanger crew into another unit, but they suffered high casualties when the Sepies put those rounds through it." Mi-Kus says.

“How many?”

“Initial reports say about a hundred, but there’s about a dozen in critical condition.” The Lieutenant replies.

“We will hold, if they want this ship they will have to pry it from our cold dead hands.” I mutter in reply, it was the least those already dead deserved.

I receive stern glances and nods from the surrounding crew. I approach the tactical display and check the slugthrower for any damage and double check that I had, in fact, reloaded it. I look through the window and see the Separatists so uncomfortably close, but at least the shooting had stopped. Some kind of tactically silent agreement that shooting at one another in a boarding action was a stupid idea.

“Do we have a turbolaser locked onto the enemy docking port?” I ask.

“Of course, sir. We have three trained on it.” Mi-Kus replies.

I hate the quiet. I know the blastdoors will only buy so much time. We cannot redeploy our shields so close to the enemy ship, but neither can they. I

change the tactical display to one of the ship and begin to mark the barricades and choke-points throughout the ship.

“Sir, enemy has breached the blastdoors. Bridge barricade one is pulling back, reactor barricade one is supplying covering fire, but close to pulling back as well.” I hear Sergeant Slas say.

“Any turbolasers have a good shot at the enemy bridge?” I ask.

“No, sir.” Comes a quick reply. I can hear the blasterfire through the doors.

“Probably for the best, that droid brain is allegedly very aggressive without directions.” I say to myself.

“Sir, second barricades have made contact. The e-web on bridge barricade two is making the engagement easier, but they are reporting worsening conditions.” Sergeant Slas reports.

I feel oddly calm now. Calmer than I do commanding a true naval battle. Maybe it’s because it’s my ship, maybe because I trust my crew, maybe

because I have no other choice, maybe because I have burnt away my anger in holding off the first assault.

I had to do something. I change the tactical display back to it's system display, the blue miniature Little Revenge docked with the red miniature Recusant. I stare at it, trying to find some kind of answer, which refuses to appear.

"Sir, the second bridge barricade has been overrun." I hear Slas say.

Something to save us, something to destroy the Recusant. They still have us in their tractor beam. Nothing. I have nothing. I remove the slugthrower from its holster again and walk away from the tactical display. The doors open for me and close behind. I walk up to the barricade, standing tall and trying not to flinch whenever a blasterbolt races past me. I can easily see the marching B2s, though behind them are B1s. We were bleeding them.

I look around myself. Clones, some with their new gray-blue and black paint adorning their armor in a dozen styles they must have picked up from the other crew. They are fighting valiantly, even with scorch marks on their armor and bandaged wounds. The crew themselves, be the Navy arms-men, technicians, midshipmen or of any other posting are fighting the droids, or moving the wounded towards the armory, out of the way of the droids.

I march towards the barricade itself and start to unload the slugthrower. A crack and a B2 has its red eye shattered and falls to the ground. Another crack and a B1 near the back loses its entire head, the slug lodging itself in the following B1, causing it too to collapse. Cracks of the slugthrower join the symphony of violence.

Hardly a symphony, I thought as I calmly stood tall while reloading the slugthrower with another clip. A cacophony still is too good for the violence here. It is noise, angry noise, not discordant, not harmonious, but noise. No rhythm, no rhyme. No heroic music for the successes, no melancholy tune for the tragedies. I fire off another round, it is simply noise.

Mi-Kus was mildly concerned when his Captain, no wait, Commodore Dericote, left him the bridge to try and hold off the advancing droids. He was slightly more concerned when the Commodore returned and started staring intensely at the tactical map without finding anything to exploit. He was considering the merits of panic when the Commodore huffed angrily pulled his slugthrower, why doesn't he just use a blaster like most of civilized space Mi-Kus still doesn't know, and marched out of the bridge without so much as a word.

He supposes he will simply do as he always does, support where he can and take command when he must. Though honestly there isn't much he can do right now. He's cut power to the elevators, locked the stairs to the bridge level and down to the reactor level, he has followed his orders and found a couple

batteries with a good shot on the enemy docking port, simply waiting for the right opportunity.

“Sir, we’re detecting multiple hyperspace signatures.” Mi-Kus hears, drawing him close to the sensor post.

“Reinforcements?” He asks, hope evident in his voice.

"Ships exiting from one of the seasonal routes." A secondary sensors officer reports.

“Incoming transmission.” Sergeant Slas says.

Mi-Kus hurries back to the holograph and nods at the Mon Calamari to put it through. The tactical display is replaced by a joyful looking pirate. He throws his arms out and slowly returns them to in front of his chest as he speaks: *“Ahh, my Republic friends, of excellent repute. I see you are in quite a situation, aren’t you.”*

“Ohnaka, may I request your assistance on behalf of my Commodore?” Mi-Kus asks, a mixture of annoyance and relief evident in his voice.

"Well, I suppose with our friend's new promotion this will require an up-charge. I understand we are here for my last payment, but this separate transaction requires something more real, no? Weapons sound good, maybe a fancy cruiser? Or supplies, supplies are good money makers in a war. If our friend guarantee such a thing I will be more than happy to assist in your endeavors to fight off this very mighty war vessel." The pirate needles.

"Fine, I am certain Commodore Dericote is willing to negotiate a reasonable price with you, after and only after the Separatist ship is no longer a threat." Mi-Kus spits out.

"Excellent, I shall see you once this great battle is over!" Hondo says, giving an exaggerated bow.

"Pirate ships made another jump from their previous position." The previous sensors officer reports.

Mi-Kus still hears the blasterfire. He shakes his head to try and get the bad taste out of his mouth. He punches in the Commodore's comm number into his and waits for him to pick up. He switches the tactical display back on.

“*What is it Lieutenant?*” Comes the voice of his superior.

“Sir, Ohnaka is arriving to support us momentarily. He will assist us in return for a more advantageous deal.”

Mi-Kus hears a crack through the comm before he hears Dericote speak again: “*Damn that pirate, he better deliver or I’ll tear the letter of marque up in front of him and arrest the bastard for some charge I’m certain he still has. Dericote out.*”

“Sir, Ohnaka’s ships have entered the engagement area. Three Coronas from before and six HH-87 starhoppers. They’re picking up speed.” Mi-Kus hears the sensors officer say.

“Open fire on the enemy docking port. Put up starboard blastdoor 2 and all ahead full, leaning portside. Fire at will.” he orders.

Three starboard turbolaser unleash their payload into the armored docking bridge of the Recusant as the ship lurches forward, its engines straining against the tractor beam. The rapidly changing situation seemed to confuse the droids for a moment, the Little Revenge trying to pull away from the Separatist cruiser while unloading all starboard weapons into the armor of the

Recusant. The repeated volleys breaking through the layered armor plates, their debris bouncing off the Little Revenge's hull.

Finally whatever droid was in command rebooted their logic system and started returning fire, the turbolasers impacting on the hull of the Little Revenge. The two sides exchanged fire, tearing into each other's armor plates and weapons systems.

Mi-Kus looks at the tactical display, Hondo's ships are approaching quickly already within range and firing their ion cannons to take out the local shields before unleashing lasers and concussion missiles into the Recusant's bridge, leaving a mess of slag behind. A further exchange of fire between the two cruisers and the Little Revenge lurches forward and keeps moving. The tractor beam emitter must have been hit.

"I want all batteries to open fire on the Recusant's weak point!" Mi-Kus bellows.

The Little Revenge is accelerating alongside the Recusant, sustaining enemy fire while unloading her own payload into the side of the hostile cruiser. They make it to the enemy's engine block and unload two full broadsides into the Recusant's exposed skeleton. The Separatist ship attempted to turn after the Little Revenge, but it was a little too late and concentrated turbolaser and

laserfire broke into the exposed structure and with two and a half volleys broke through the weakpoint.

“All ahead full! And get the shields back up!” Mi-Kus ordered, as the Little Revenge pulled away from the Recusant, it’s engine block snapped away from it and leaking fuel.

The Pirates finished their run and moved into a supporting roll as the Little Revenge made a large arc around the engine block. Her shields were finally back up and she showed her undamaged portside to the still defiant Recusant.

“Open fire.” Mi-Kus says and the guns answer.

It was like a tragedy from the opera, Mi-Kus mused. Two great foes fighting to the bitter end, the underdog defeating the greater power through help from a scrupulous ally. He cracked a smile at the thought, the blastefire had subsided and the enemy ship would not outlast them now. Especially without it being able to maneuver. This was a mercy killing.

The Recusant did not last much longer, its reactor detonating after one of Ohnaka’s frigates fired a missile into the Recusant’s reactor. The ship lit up

like a matchstick leaving only the Pirates, the Little Revenge and a pile of debris in system.