**Begin Log: T5B4M4 - Buoys Will Be Buoys**

***Jila Cosa: Additional p.o.v.*** - takes place before the Buoys Will Be Buoys briefing.

I was happy. Happier than I'd been in a very long time.

Don't get me wrong, watching people I was just beginning to know die was not doing me a whole lot of good, but when I was with the other techs in the droid bay I was much more comfortable and at ease then ever before. Maybe it was just that there was no competition, nobody trying to outdo everybody else for a promotion. We were all working for the same cause. I found myself smiling a lot more now. I had come to realize that Captain Ra wasn't big on compliments, that if he wasn't pacing, grumbling, or yelling then he was happy about the work we'd done. He might not tell you in so many words, but you could tell by the sharp nod of his head that things were going all right.

The new Bar & Grill was coming along great. Maybe I should just call it just *The Grill* since all of Tesserak's stock had been left aboard the *Aragorn*, and as I've said before, the IMPs aren't real big on relaxation. After Shock had given the okay that *Black Widow* was absolutely safe, a few of the droids and I went scrounging. Even with the new crew that Captain Horvath had brought in with the Spiculum, there were many crew quarters still unused. The quarters were furnished pretty much the same as we’d had on the *Aragorn*; a set of bunkbeds, a table, and a chair. It didn't take long for the maintenance droids I'd appropriated to relieve the floor of its burden and take the chairs up to Tesserak's new place. I hoped that nobody would really notice that these droids weren't quite Exactly where they should have been.

After the droids and I had taken up a large load of tables, chairs, and dishware, and we'd been congratulated by Tess for a job well done (*He feigned a coronary when saw how much stuff I’d ‘found’*. I chuckled.), I returned to my quarters to sat and think. *I need to memorize the route to TacOps.* I nodded, remembering how long it had taken me to get there while I was reading schematics along the way.

First, though, I needed to clean up. I grabbed out a clean uniform, and then ducked into the fresher. Smelling and looking much better, I put on my clean clothes, grabbed my datapad, and left my quarters. I thought back to the last two times I had gone to TacOps, and tried going there completely from memory. I did pretty good. I only had to check the schematics once. As I walked down the hallway toward TacOps (I'd planned to memorize the route back to the Droid Bay and to my quarters from the door itself), my datapad beeped.

*REPORT TO TACOPS,* it blinked.

As I walked though the door of TacOps I heard Rivyn's unmistakable voice. *Attention TacOps. Admiral Daggerscout is here with the chips. And he's smiling!* She chuckled over the comm just before she paused.

I sighed. If Admiral Daggerscout was smiling that meant that whoever they had gotten the information from had probably been Scared Witless, and rumor had it that Kanashaak had gone along on this task.

*He's giving the chips to Comp/Comm now. He says to tell you he's headed your way with some information he has for you. We'll let you know as soon as Comp/Comm has something.*

The human woman of the TacTeam looked at me, opened her mouth as if to speak, and then closed it again. "That was fast." She finally said.

"I was walking the route from my quarters, and trying to memorize it." I explained as I picked up my headset from its usual place. "I haven't had time until now to do it."

"You won't need your headset today, Lieutenant Commander." The verpine said through its translator.

"Uh, okay." I put the headset back down.

"This is a planning session only." The human woman adjusted the controls on the holotank to get a closer view of the simulated mine field that had been laid out according to the information they had available.

"Then, if you don't mind my asking... What am I doing here?" I said hesitantly. "My job is to relay orders, not..." It was then that I started getting nervous. All three Tac members looked at me strangely, like I'd just refused an order from the Admiral himself.

"You are here to... what is it the Admiral calls it... ah, to *keep us honest*." The mon calamari smiled (It was an odd looking thing but it was what they'd call a smile). "Having spent time with the Greys you would now better than we how they will react to what we will now plan."

"And you will need to keep the Admiral appraised on our progress," the verpine added, "as he is not be able to be here."

"But..." I wanted to tell them how little I really knew about the Greys who were left but I let it go for now. I didn't know who would be flying the mission anyway. I grabbed a chair and sat by the holotank.

Admiral Daggerscout slipped through the door before it had opened all the way, and set a comp chip on the edge of the holotank. "Here's the information you're going to need for the rest of the buoy sites; area conditions and maintenance schedules."

"Thank you, sir." The verpine picked up the comp chip like it was made from a very fragile substance and inserted it into the terminal. The mon calamari asked for the information for this sector and it instantly appeared in the holo. The TacTeam forgot about Admiral Daggerscout for the moment, and concentrated fully on the new information. The Admiral nodded in my direction, excusing himself from the room, and I saluted him as he deserved.

"Time is of the essence." The mon calamari stated. "We must get the pilots in and out of here before anyone is the wiser."

"Yes, but how?" The human woman asked. "They can't fly through this mess. The mines are set too close."

"Wait," the verpine said softly. "What do we know about the area?"

"Historical data suggests that Imperial tactics relies heavily on number, rather than any clear strategic back where their use of minefields is concerned. We can infer that there will be a large number of mines, but few defending craft, unless we have the misfortune to interrupt the maintenance or moving of the field and buoy."

"Still, mines are deadly to TIE Fighters and Bombers, shielded or not. The Interceptors are borderline for this type of thing. But the Advanced TIEs can handle them with minimal problem, given a halfway competent pilot."

"Agreed. The Avengers are the faster and stronger craft, and more likely to survive through this mission."

"How many Avengers do we have."

"Only three. But they are equipped with hyperdrives, and so can be sent on solo recovery missions."

“There are eight buoy locations.”

“Three missions for two of them.”

“Switch pilots between, along with refuel and any possible repairs. Too long.”

“Agreed. That will take too long. Anticipated reprisal will likely be swift, limiting the number of buoys that can be recovered. We need all recovery operations in progress simultaneously, to be sure that we have recovered as many of them as possible before Malachite intervenes.”

"How many shielded Interceptors do we have?"

"Six. But they will not be able to hyper in."

"Unfortunately at this point in time the only choice we have is to send the Interceptors out. Time is our primary concern.”

“The Assault Transports can tow the three out, drop them off, and then two can return to take the next set of Interceptors.”

“After delivering the second two, they can return to the first buoy locations and retrieve their charges.”

“Continuing on to the second set after dropping off the first ones.”

“Leaving one Transport to accomplish recovery of an Advanced if it has not returned in a reasonable amount of time.”

“Time and equipment usage are optimized.”

“Have all the Greys run the ComTac Mine Racer mission?”

The verpine checked his datapad. “Yes. Many times.”

“Objections?” There were none.

“Then pilots shall be paired with fighters according to minefield score ability, giving weight to the most skilled pilots the Inter...”

"Um... excuse me." I spoke up timidly. Tactical wasn't my field, and I really didn't want to interrupt, but...

"Yes, Lieutenant Commander?" The three TacTeam members all turned to me.

"Uh, I was just thinking. What if there are Imps here that we've missed?" They continued to look at me blankly, and in my nervousness I just let everything dump out at once. "We've had surprises every step of the way, and I don't think that we should count on not having one now. You just said that Imps tend to rely on numbers. What if there are Imps on site at any of the first three Interceptor locations? What if one is hit? What if the pilot is ejected in the middle of the mine field? What if they’re EVA, and something happens at one of the second set of sites? What if something happens here, and we can’t take the time to retrieve them? Or what happens if we need fighters here? The TIE Fighters and Bombers aren’t enough. You said so earlier. You can’t just send out an Interceptor and then leave it there alone. Everything depends on all the Greys being here, and all of them having suitable fighters to fly." Just then my hands started to shake and I clasped them together tightly so that maybe no one would notice.

"She’s right,” the human woman spoke up. "Our whole timetable..."

*YES!!!* The Bothan's voice shouted over the comm.

*Sorry TacOps.* Rivyn chuckled as she apologized. *But as you just heard, Lieutenant Commander Shi'asa and her team have successfully hacked the chips. The coordinates are coming to you now.*

"Very good." the mon calamari said as he scanned the comp screen.

"As I was going to say," the human woman started again. "You are right. We’ll have to leave the Transports on location with the Interceptors. But that will sacrifice time."

“We’ll have to send two of the Avengers back out. Time will be wasted.”

“Miss Cosa is correct, though. And we don’t have any other better choices.”

“Agreed. Objections?” The verpine paused. “Miss Cosa?”

I shook my head.

“Then this is the path we shall take. Now to the finer details.”

I felt relieved, but not by much. With nothing else for the team to plan except for which direction to start from, I buzzed the Admiral's office comm to deliver my report. When it answered, I wrote my report and sent it to the Admiral's computer accompanied by a message for the Admiral's droid Katie.

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***Vykk Theron: Flight 3.1, Main P.O.V.***

Vykk was slowly opened his eyes. Everything looked pink and blurry. That along with the fact that he felt like he was floating clued him into the fact that he was in a bacta tank. Someone walked up to the tank and tapped on it. It looked like Zsinj but Vykk wasn't entirely sure. The person motioned upwards. Vykk looked up and saw that the top of the tank had been opened. Two half hearted kicks propelled him to the top. He was helped out of the tank by Major Ototh.

“How are you feeling?” The doctor asked melodically.

“Like a rancor just chewed me up and spit me out.” Vykk said with a groan as he tried to move muscles that didn’t want to.

“Heh! That’s not surprising, considering the state that they brought you back in.” Zsinj said as he made his way up the steps. “They pulled enough shrapnel out of you to build a strike cruiser.”

“He exaggerates, but we did a fair amount of reconstructive work on your skeletal system.”

Vykk walked over to the shower and began to rinse off the residue from the tank. “I released from the *Brier*, and things were going pretty good. I had managed to clear out almost all the mines but then I guess I screwed up. There were two mines sitting right next to each other. An ion mine and a missile mine. I was trying to avoid an advanced missile that had been launched at me and I wound up colliding with both. My interceptor, both mines and the missile that had been chasing me all detonated at about the same time.” Vykk leaned up against the wall looking a bit rattled. “I thought I was dead for sure.”

“Thanks to the *Brier*, you’re not. I suggest that you take this deck suit and rest in your quarters.” Ototh said.

“Right.” Vykk said as he stood up straight and began to follow the Major towards where the new clothes were. Halfway there he stopped.

“Something wrong?” Zsinj asked.

“I don’t remember where my quarters are.” Vykk replied, sounding embarrassed.

Zsinj laughed. “Get dressed. I’ll show you.”

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***Taan “Hawk” Ronar: Flight 3.2, Alternate p.o.v.***

“Your starfighters are prepped, such as we have left, and your assignments are on your datapads. You should be ready to head out on your separate missions in about fifteen minutes. Nest high, my Greys.”

The pilots of Grey Squadron walked out of the briefing room to prepare for their new mission, chatting about what to expect and making side wagers on their performance. Taan stayed behind as the others walked out, and Castor looked up expectantly.

“Sir.” Taan began.

“Is this about Greedo?” Castor guessed.

“Well, yes.” Taan took a breath. “You know how I feel about him. And although I don’t deny he is a tactical genius, and wants nothing more than to defeat Malachite, I have to wonder if sending single fighters out to wipe out entire minefields is a good idea. Surely we would be safer in pairs, at least?”

“I would like to send you out in pairs, but the Assault Transports can’t handle it. And time is a major factor. Moving the *Widow* from our current position to wipe out one minefield at a time is dangerous, to say the least, so launching single Avengers and the Interceptors paired with the Transports are our only choice. You’ve tried the Alliance Fighter ComTacs missions, I assume?”

“Of course. I was able to complete the *Mine Racer* mission, like nearly everyone on board this ship. That doesn’t mean I support taking unnecessary risks, though.”

“I’m confident you can handle it.” Castor smiled. “Feel, don’t think. Use your instincts.”

“Have I heard that before somewhere?”

“I don’t think so. Now go on, your Interceptor’s waiting for you.”

The Assault Transport pulled out of hyperspace about ten klicks away from the buoy’s position. Taan was already in his fighter and he detached as soon as they had returned to sublight speed. He pulled away immediately from the *Aranea One* and headed for the cluster of small objects.

*Nice detachment, Grey.* The *Aranae One’s* captain commented.

“Thanks, *Aranae*. Wait here until I clear the mines. I’ll let you know when I’m done.”

*Roger that. But suggest we move in closer by about five. Just in case. We’ll wait for your Go Ahead, but want to watch out for you too.*

“Roger, closer by five.” Taan charged up his shields and headed for the minefield at full throttle. The small dark cloud became clearer as Taan closed in on it, the multitude of deadly objects becoming visible. There were plenty of each type of mine there; the usual Type A lasers, Type B ion cannons and the particularly dangerous Type C mines, which launch warheads when destroyed. Even in a shielded fighter, this was dangerous work. One missile could vaporize Taan’s TIE Interceptor, even if it had full shields. All this was running through the back of Taan’s mind as he closed to firing range of the mine cluster. One quick shot and the mine exploded in a small cloud of flame, coinciding with the near‑simultaneous barrage of laser and ion blasts from every direction. Taan pulled the throttle back slightly and turned to face the next mine.

One by one, each mine disappeared, the Type As and Bs going first, leaving only the Type Cs. Taan avoided the endless stream of laser bursts as best he could, but the sheer number of them occasionally got the better of him and his shields were constantly being charged to prevent hull damage.

*Going well Grey! You’re almost there*! The *Aranae One* said encouragingly.

Taan chased a missile down, destroying it before it could get a solid lock. “Thanks, *Aranae!* I’m nearly done here. Let’s hope this is worth it.” The final Type C mine disintegrated from a quad‑linked laser shot, simultaneously destroying both the mine and the missile inside. “She’s all your’s, *Aranae*.”

*Roger that. Thanks for the assist.* The Assault Transport powered up and moved in to pick up the tug holding the buoy. *I assume you’re hitching a ride with us?*

“You better believe it! Unless one of the techs fitted this thing with hyperdrive, I don’t feel like taking the long way home.”

*At least that thing can make a decent speed, this hunk of junk’s slower than those dupes we keep coming up against.* By now, the *Aranae One* was just coming in above the tug, maneuvering around to dock with it. The clamps locked on to the tiny ship’s hull and the transport throttled back up and headed for the hyperspace vector. *Grab on Grey, we’re moving out.*

Taan unhooked his ship outside of the *Black Widow* and flew in, the tractor beam guiding him into the hangar. Ray, grinning uncontrollably, was standing on the flight deck as Taan climbed out of the cramped cockpit.

“How easy was that?”

Taan grinned back, for the first time in days. “Easy stuff. I forgot how much fun it was to shoot stuff that didn’t move!” He motioned in the general direction of the makeshift bar. “Let’s get a drink to celebrate. I assume yours was fairly straightforward?”

“Nothing these things couldn’t handle.” Ray looked up at the Avengers. “What do you reckon our odds are of getting another mission like this?”

Taan made a mock face of concentration, pretending to think about it. “Hmm... Well, considering our past missions, factoring in our current position and objectives, I’d say about zero to none.”

“Couldn’t agree more.” Ray stopped to look out the massive hangar bay. “It’s pretty out there, you don’t get much time to appreciate it when you’re fighting for your life.”

“No, but I suppose we’re not getting paid to watch the galaxy go by.” Taan shrugged. “Through adversity to the stars.”

“I'll drink to that.”

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***Rensal “Bigfoot” Darklighter: Flight 3.3, alternate p.o.v.***

*A minefield! This will be fun!*  I thought. I looked at my datapad as I entered the hanger “ Nice. I got one of the Squints. Must be from the experience with the disengagement tactics.” I said.

“Don’t worry. I got one too.” Said Taan.

“Well, I know we can handle this mission easily.”

“Oh, yeah! Very easily.”

“Well. Remember Folor?”

“Who can forget that hole?”

“I don’t know. But that mine field they have there is a tough one.”

“Sure is!” The mission light went red.

“Time to go! Good luck, Hawk! And may the Force be with you!”

“Thanks! Same to you!”

I nodded and mounted the battle scarred Interceptor I was assigned. I went through the warm up and system checks, and everything showed green. I cued my com. “Grey Eight, ready to launch.”

*Your clear Eight. May the force be with you.*

I launched from the *Black Widow* and rendezvoused with the waiting *Aranea Two* which then towed me to my assigned mine field.

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I watched the count down for reversion.

3...

*Shields up full.*

2...

*Lasers batteries full and primed.*

1...

*Here it goes! Hope no one’s waiting.*

0...

The star field whirled back into view, and I broke down and starboard away from the *Aranae Two*, then came up and flew in towards the minefield.

*Nice breakaway Grey.*

“Thank you, *Aranea*! Hold here while I clear the field.”

*We copy. But we’re going to move in a little closer so we can watch out for you a little better.* The *Aranae Two’s* captain replied. *Sensors show a tug in the middle of the field. No sign of the bouy.*

“It’s inside to be worked on probably. Let’s hope we can get them before they get smart enough to wipe the memory.”

I entered the minefield and started looping, trying to evade the multiple shots being fired at me. The hiss of my shields every few seconds prompted me to redirect energy from my lasers to my shields. “*Aranae Two*, come in. The tug might bolt anytime, but I’ve almost got this thing clear.”

*On our way, Grey.*

I swooped over the top of the tug and fired at point blank range at a mine. My Interceptor solar panel clanged very loudly, and my ejection seat propelled me back over towards the tug. I watched as the *Aranae Two* came in and got hold of the tug. But my suit support system must have gotten damaged because I blacked out as they pulled me in and then locked onto my tumbling fighter.

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“He’s had a little bit of exposure, but at least he didn’t hit anything.” I heard as my senses came back.

“Thank you, Sheryl.” I heard come from Taan.

“Hawk! How’d you do?” I asked startling both of them.

“Better than you did, obviously. What happened?”

“Sir. You need your rest!” Said Sheryl.

“In a minute. I went over the tug that was holding the thing, and attacked a mine. It must have been a class C, ‘cause it disintegrated but got me anyway.”

“Ouch! Glad your still with us.”

“I am glad to be here! Now let me get some rest, and I’ll be back up in two and a half hours.”

“Ok! See ya in a few then.”

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***Adam “Vender” Fene***

Vender checked his datapad as he strolled into the hangar. A frown spread across his face, remembering his last mission in which he was, for the second time, shot down and nearly killed. With great luck he had managed to rig a make‑shift ejection system and fly out of a burned out hole in his cockpit to escape the exploding TIE after his normal ejection system went offline. The Trips carried ion blasters, which made Vender shudder at the pure evil in the design.

Looking around the hangar, he realized yet again, that he was alone. Just like the dead of space, he was just another unrecognizable constellation in the galaxy. He was starting to feel distant from his Grey comrades for some reason. Maybe it was his own personal separation, maybe they just thought he was bad luck. Despite being twenty two standard years old, he felt old age creep up on him, remembering everything he had been through for the New Republic. It seemed to be more than four years since he’d joined with everything that had happened.

Vender looked up at the Avenger. “Another round, my friend?” He talked to the Bright as if it was coherent and could respond to his question. He usually felt a close bond between him and his craft, or tried to form one if he wasn’t familiar with it. His old Fighter had been destroyed, and so he was starting to feel even more alone than before.

“We can handle it.” Vender walked up to the Advanced TIE, and placed his palm flat against the huge ball cockpit that held its wings together. “Just tell me your mood and I’ll promise that I will make the best effort not to kill us.” The cold metal the Interceptor was constructed of seemed like an appropriate response. “You’ll be fine. Just you and me, friend.”

Black Widow *confirms TIE launch. Good luck Thorn.* He flew off at dizzying pace.

“Thanks, Control. I’ll need it.” Vender looked through his aft window to see the Widow quickly shrink as the distance between them steadily grew.

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“This shouldn’t be too hard.” He thought to himself. “I have shields. I have speed. I have...” The Avenger controls started beeping at him, informing him of the large minefield ahead of him as he flew within firing distance. “I have a new friend.” Vender grinned to himself.

Ion cannons as well as normal laser fire sizzled past him as he slammed his foot into the rudder and banked hard to starboard. Vender decided going to port was becoming too much a habit, and would have to break that soon. The mine field insisted in slaughtering him as he kept in a tight corkscrew roll as he switched to duel fire.

Coming out of his spin he suddenly whipped his craft to port, feeling the G‑Force on him with such a hard turn. “Only take a second.” Suddenly he opened fire without warning, firing blindly without his target sensors to destroy six mines in a row, in one strafing run. “Nice.”

Quickly, he switched to single fire as the mines were big enough he could easily just hit them with one shot. He began to make the Avenger climb into a roll in a long arching loop to keep the enemy fire away from him, and come around for another pass. Vender’s instincts finally kicked in. “No... I have to push myself, this is too easy doing it this way. My skills are going to get worse if I keep this up..” He thought to himself.

He pushed his throttle up and let the shield energy drain away from his Advanced TIE. “Trust me doll. I’ll shunt you some energy to the shields once in a while, just in case one of those mines gets off a lucky shot.” Vender slide‑slipped into a line of mines and began a corkscrew maneuver as his laser shots hit their targets with defined precision. Soon he was in the middle of the mine field and flew right past the Tug with the probe, identifying it. “Another few minutes and I’ll have the probe.”

Vender pushed on, whipping his craft around to head back into the center of the field. He fired off another few shots, one hitting a mine, and another just missing an odd looking mine. “Oh, crap! That thing.” The next laser hit the mine, making it explode as a missile shot out of it. Vender became temporarily distracted as an ion bolt hit him from a nearby mine, frying his shield system. “Force!”

Vender pulled up in a long arc to try and get behind the missiles, using the *Wotan Weave* as he did so. He pulled around too fast, and it slipped gracefully behind him. “Damn these things! Another twenty seconds before it self detonates. Maybe it can take out a few of these mines.” Suddenly he grinned and started a tight and quick roll using his awesome maneuverability to fly straight at a normal mine. It shot furiously, but missed each time. He was within ten meters of it as he pulled up, pulling hard on the stick as the mine’s next shot just missed him and hitting the pursuing missile instead. “Whew!”

Vender dove back into the mine field, using their own weapons against them. His weapons blazed as the sweat on his forehead increased. He side slipped when he could, knowing some shots would miss him and hit another mine. His sensors indicated a few times that this was the case. “Suckers.”

Soon, the mine field was cleared except for the last few of the odd looking mines that shot missiles when they were destroyed. He’d already deprived them of their ion firing section. Vender looped around and flew directly toward where the missile would exit the mine, and shot a single laser at it, and then fired another a few short seconds after. As the first laser hit, it destroyed the mine. As the missile began to launch, the second shot detonated that, destroying it.

He repeated the procedure with the remaining mines as best he could, having good success. “The probe is mine! And the crowd goes wild!” He raised his two fists from the Avengers controls, and mimicked a large number of distant people cheering, as if heard through a holocast comm.

Vender approached slowly, seeing no personnel on board the tug that was carrying the probe, and eventually got a solid tow lock. He pulled up the coordinates back to the *Widow*, set the autopilot, and started to close his eyes for the long trip home. He felt more comfortable sleeping there, rather than the *Black Widow*. It still had that creepy feeling, especially when there might still be Imperials running around on it. Especially when Castor did that weird cloaking maneuver to run away from him when he wanted to play bat‑gammon.

Vender sniffed as he went to hyperspace, unsure of what was next, or what he’d do. He almost felt like a mere stormtrooper that would throw himself in a bottomless hole at the Emperor’s whim. Which ironically made him laugh because of how the Emperor died. He sighed one more time in frustration.

“If they don’t wanna talk to me, I’ll just isolate myself further.” Vender nodded his head as his eyes were closed. “Not like it will make any more difference than before.”

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***Dave Trebonius‑Astoris: Alternate p.o.v.***

Dave sat alone.

The *Black Widow* was still essentially deserted. The extra people from the Spiculum were filtering in, but they could not and would not fill up the gigantic starship. Dave had sought out one of the alternate command conference rooms deep in the bowels of the ship below the superstructure to sit and think on his own.

He had not been drawn for the minefield assignment. *I’m not particularly sure I would have gone even if I had been drawn,* he thought cooly to himself. He didn’t like to think of himself as brooding, but that was most likely what he really was doing. Dave had told himself that he would not serve under Greedo, and he had meant it. He had in no way abandoned his certainty that Grey’s early losses had been almost entirely Greedo’s fault. Greedo’s return has been greeted with apathy from most of the Grey’s, but Dave had responded without outright hostility and had refused to be present when the rodian’s vessel had entered the *Black Widow’s* hangar bay.

Decisions, incidents, and issues swirled through Dave’s mind at an alarming rate. People told him that he had a complex mind, and for years he had used that mind to serve various military organizations. Most recently, he had spent a good deal more than twenty years in service to the Alliance, and then the New Republic. His body might be getting old, but his mind was still sharp and in some ways not reconciled to his changed circumstances. Only months ago he had been in command, and he could remember it quite clearly. Now he was not in command. Now he was squarely at odds with the command structure above him. It was not the first time such a thing had happened. But the last time he had severely disagreed with a command structure had been more than thirty years ago, and the offending party had paid for it by taking a blaster bolt to the chest.

Somehow Dave didn’t think that such a solution would be acceptable this time. So he had simply left. All sentient creatures had that capacity: the first instinct is always to flee. And so here Dave was, in the bowels of a Star Destroyer, sitting in the dark, thinking to himself. His mind was churning. It would not stop churning until he made a decision on what he had to do. And if he had to stay down here for a week, he knew he could. One thing was clear: he didn’t like Greedo.

Somewhat startled by the vehemence of that declaration, Dave tried to examine the issue further. Rage? Jealously? Contempt? It was hard to place the emotion. Certainly, Dave knew the rodian to be incompetent. Could there be more to the issue? Could there?

He continued to sit alone.

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End log: T5B4M4

**Battle 4, Mission 5: Two From Column A...**

by R.C.Miller (Castor@RebelSquadrons.org)

A Grey Squadron, of the Rebel Squadrons, Additional Text Briefing

for Grey Squadron’s add-on Mission 5, Battle 4, Tour 5

for the Star Wars TIE Fighter Combat Simulator game.

The bothan stood before a wide window. The ventilated mask that covered her face was mostly one solid piece, but it had no eye ports. It had originally been fit strictly for humans, but Captain Ra’s people had modified the shape and fit, adding adjustable straps and padding to allow the mask to be worn by most humanoid species. The glove counterparts to the waldo system, which had been similarly modified, were cooled for extended use, as well.

What the Comp/Comm Lead was seeing through the mask was an extremely tiny section of the chip that sat clamped in a small vise in the middle of the partitioned off section of the room, and which was the direct focus of attention of the various arms, scopes and tiny welder probes controlled by Chiri and Lieutenant Araiari, similarly outfitted. She moved as if hanging up a tool, and one of the arms retracted, very slowly at first, but then picking up speed until it was entirely clear of the work area. She mimed taking something off some sort of a hook, and another arm moved to mirror her actions, approaching the chip with ever decreasing speed. All of the microscopic movement was shown on a large screen to the side. Finer detailed work would be likely seen only in the MedLab, and the two had been at it for about six hours. It was hard to imagine, considering Lieutenant Commander Shi’asa’s normally exaggeratedly expressive arm movements, that she could actually do this type of work for any amount of time.

After mapping the electronics of the chip, and cataloguing the functions of the pieces, the two had attached a readout screen to the chip, bypassing the autodestructs. They’d caused two of the original set of chips to wipe themselves already, before hacking the hardware successfully. The software was much simpler, since it had to be compatible with normal navicomps.

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The Tech that had supplied the original info about the chips, had also given them a little more and certainly unexpected data.

Well. Not exactly *given,* per se.

After the first of the two chips had wiped itself, they’d asked the Tech more questions. After the second chip had rendered itself useless, even using the information the Tech had given them, Castor had mind probed the Tech. And if the Tech had understood the consequences of his actions better, he might have been more cooperative to begin with. Or, at least, he’d have been more accurate.

The first thing the Admiral had found was the self destruct sequence the Tech had begun. It was basically a three step poison, which was foremost in the Tech’s mind and right up there in the front for Castor to see once he established the probe.

Apparently, the first step of the compound poison was given to all the members of the *Star Hammer* project. It took up residence in the liver and then lay dormant. The second step would be self administered, in the unlikely event of capture, by way of a concealed device on their persons; a fake tooth or fingernail. The combination of the two formed a substance which built up in the liver. This substance would quickly increase in volume and mass and eventually cause total hepatic and renal failure in less than one standard day. Death would follow shortly after as the malignancy of the liver would then quickly spread outward to the other major organs. This chain reaction could be forestalled only by a third compound found in all the food on the *Black Widow*. Self destruction could be initiated and accomplished by simply inducing the second stage and then not eating for a single day. Without the introduction of the second stage compound, the other two were completely harmless.

The Tech hadn’t eaten in about twenty hours, and knew that he’d be dead soon. And not even bacta could reverse the effects. Castor discovered most of this with his probe. He’d gotten rest of the details from Zalla. It had been one of the things they’d lived with constantly while at the project. At first. Admittedly, though, it had been a year or two since she’d even thought about it. The commanders had told them about the process a long time ago, but most people hadn’t really taken it seriously, and Zalla had entirely forgotten about it. Being a doctor and healer, it was something she’d never considered as an option, so she’d filed that information in the back of her mind, where it sat collecting thick layers of dust. Much to the MedTech’s chagrin, Castor had asked her to please try to recall any other pertinent medical information that we might find useful.

They’d ended up force-feeding the Tech intravenously to delay his death, and Castor had called Teke on the comm to ask about hunger strikes on the part of the prisoners.

“Funny you should mention that.” Teke began. “Most of the prisoners refused to eat anything at all since yesterday morning. Not all of them. But a lot.”

“When was their last meal? And when were they checked on last?” Castor asked.

“Last meal was about ten hours ago. We’re in the night cycle now, in all the brigs. They all seem to be sleeping.” Teke replied after a short pause during which he must have queried the on duty brig officers.

“Get any one left alive to MedOps. They’ll explain, and they’ll get food into them one way or another. Keep them all under heavy guard. I don’t know how fast the reversal is, and any one of them could be a holdout.”

“Yes, sir.” Teke responded. “The freefloater...” Teke said voicing a thought that hadn’t quite yet made it’s way to Castor fully.

“If this thing was in effect throughout the project, then they’re probably all dead already, unless they’re hoping to be rescued by their own people.” Castor said. “We’ll check on them when we can, but I don’t think we’re going to find much. There might be some.”

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Every one of the buoy retrievals had gone well.

Well... Some better than others.

But all the Greys returned alive and with their assigned buoys. Mostly.

Most even came back with their fighters intact, although Captain Ra would probably be hopping mad about the two that hadn’t. Castor wasn’t real overjoyed at having lost two more of the Interceptors, but at least the two Greys had been recovered, and those missions had been completed, as well. The tugs were a little unexpected, even though they were found to be unmanned. It was a little tricky getting the Avengers to lock onto and tow the tugs. It was a little trickier for the Transports to tow both their Interceptors and the tugs too.

Chiri used the information from the Tech Castor had gotten, volunteered or not, and was now well on her way to getting the coordinates from the remaining chips from the buoys. They been marked as to which chips matched with which original chips, so they could also ascertain which chips were chained to which destinations. Chiri was also planning on running correlation diagnostics in an attempt to theorize with any degree of certainty the probable destination of the two chips that had wiped themselves before their information had been extracted.

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The entire command teams of the *Black Widow* and the *Web* were present at the Grey briefing. General Greedo and Flame were there, as well. Castor hoped that there wouldn’t be any more untimely interruptions or other disruptions caused by his former commanding officer this time. And he hoped to all the powers that be that everyone present would be able to tolerate his attitude and taunts. The Admiral was getting hard pressed to justify their presence, much less their alleged interference. And he knew that Dave, even more than any of the rest, carried a very large dislike for the rodian. Castor really didn’t know what he could do to make that any different, other than temper Greedo’s tactics when a better plan wasn’t available.

“We are running out of usable starfighters,” Castor began without easing into the topic. “While we incurred only a few losses during the buoy missions, our current inventory includes the T-wing, two Tee-Eff-Twos, four Tee-Bee-Twos, three Tee-Eye-Twos, three Avengers, and our one Gunboat. We still have our *Tarantula*, the *Brier*, and the two *Aranae*, but those will be held back as much as possible; no one on board being qualified to fly a Scout under combat conditions, and the Assault Transports being our last resort for ions, should the Gun go down.”

“I’m also going to shelve the Fighters, the Bombers, and the T. The single Gunboat, right now, is too important to jeopardize lightly. This leaves us with just the Squints and Brights. While the Avengers are capable of effectively dealing with those Triwings, the Interceptors aren’t. All they can really do is keep them occupied until the Avengers can free themselves up. This basically leaves us with only three starfighters with which I actually feel confident that I’m not going to lose any more of you. But we can’t use just the Avengers, so someone is going to have to fly the Interceptors until we acquire something better.” The Greys were all intelligent enough to know that if the lesser fighters were needed, someone would be assigned to them, and they would launch. And that those Greys would probably die. Hopefully they might extract a modicum of attrition from Malachite’s defenses first. Very hopefully.

“The buoy missions, however, were not only successful, they were exceedingly successful! Comp/Comm has dissected the buoys and run every bit of diagnostics to which we have access on the chips. Whomever programmed the buoys was apparently secure enough in their belief that the buoys could not be compromised that the routines and destinations were all fairly well labeled.” Castor put up a finger to forestall what he knew would be Tacomah’s impending protest concerning a possible trap.

“I don’t mean to say that any of these labels were neglectfully or obviously clear. Lieutenant Commander Shi’asa ran logic searches and code traces against chips that were installed into some spare navcomp boards. With the unwilling help of the ChipTech, she was able to determine whether a chip was installed correctly or not. And after acquiring the false coordinate codes, along with some extensive research on her and her team’s part, Chiri was able to correct the installation and has verified that the coordinates we have are not false ones. Upon decoding the programming routine labels, she has found that those routines were labeled accurately and consistently, and has been able to verify this to a rather high degree of comfortability.”

“So, we now have the coordinates to what may be a good portion of the *Star Hammer* project. We know where Tourmaline’s base is. We also know where the *Star Hammer* weapon is. There may be other sections that we don’t know about, but we feel that the knowledge of the *Star Hammer* is being kept at the central location, while the other locations are mainly layers in the project’s defense. General Greedo’s exhaustive and prolonged research on the logistics acquisitions over the last few years supports the conclusion that there is only one weapon and one weapon site. We might assume that if a single weapon had been completed already, it would have been used while the second was being completed.”

“While we could attack the *Star Hammer* project at this time, we will be delaying that only until we have more and better than the few starfighters we now have. Optimistically, this means just long enough to raid Tourmaline’s base. Realistically, we may have to use a few more of these coordinates to gain what I would be satisfied to have.” Sensing the direction of thought from some of the Greys, Castor included, “Keep in mind that the probability of us having enough time to train on those Triwings to a degree of relative competence is not very high. We’ll settle for more Avengers, Gunboats, and Interceptors if we have to. We’ll take any Triwings we can back to the Squadrons, if at all possible, when this is all over.”

“This raid will be accomplished by way of a four-fold attack.” He continued. “The *Widow* and the *Web* will station themselves on opposing sides of the base, drawing their fire, and splitting it between us. This should effectively keep all the base’s guns from concentrating on either of the two ships. Shunting our shield power around should keep us relatively safe for a short time, as long as you get your parts done. On the other hand, our two capital ships will not be seriously firing on the station, however, because it’s too easy for an Imperial warship to make the mistake of continuing to fire on its target far past the point where it needs to, because of the number of lasers and turbos in play, and the fact that many of the guns on this boat fire automatically. The Imperial tendency to destroy, rather than capture tends to simplify their decision making process.”

“The Avengers will concentrate on taking out the base’s lasers, thereby keeping our two capital craft intact. The Tee-Eye-Twos will concentrate on area defense, thus allowing Flight Four to complete its task. The *Brier* will launch when you’ve gotten the base’s hull down to 50% integrity, and will complete the disabling of the base, at which time Flight Four will then aid Flight Three. Shock will transfer over on the *Tarantula*, and take the station as soon as it is clear to do so. We’re loading everybody up with advanced missiles this time. The systems strike teams will transfer on the *Brier* and the *Aranaes* after the *Tarantula* has finished with its delivery of Shock.”

“This is going to take a lot of nerve on this one. It’s another one we have to win.”

Ray interrupted. “Aren’t they all? These don’t ever get easy do they? I’d rather shoot at stuff that doesn’t move.” She groaned.

Castor frowned at the young pilot, but kept on. “No, they don’t.” He said, acknowledging her complaint simply, and continued. “We’re not prepared to give up this ship, and there is no backup plan to take another. It’s up to Flight Three to keep the pressure off Flight Four, who in turn will prevent the *Widow* and the *Web* from being destroyed.”

Castor swept his glance across all the attendees. “Any questions?”

“The Prisoners,” a voice declared, and Castor recognized it to belong to Zalla Calixte. Major Elyen Ototh, the MedOps department head had graciously accepted Spinel’s former medical officer as an alternate second officer, her knowledge of the layout and contents of MedOps being invaluable. “How many are left?” There wasn’t much resentment over her appointment, but there had been plenty of curiosity, which Castor had fielded as promptly as he had the questions about his wives; he had spoken with Tesserak, knowing that the word would get around quickly and accurately.

Teke stood. “We lost about 97 percent of the ones we had on board. There are only a few dozen left, most of which are being held in separate cells and closely monitored.” He didn’t need to mention the ones left on the freefloater. At that point, it was either all or none.

“Any other questions?” There were only curt shakes of heads. “Then let’s get ready. We’ll go hyper in about twenty minutes, and we’ll be making three short hops. The whole trip will be around fifty minutes. Grey should be ready to fly upon entry at the first destination. We assume that other area defenses are in place to prevent a straight jump to the final destination. Your assignments are on your datapads. Nest high my Greys!”

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