

ISDII: Hammer, Forward Secondary Hangar, Auxiliary Briefing Room.

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BG I/Wing I/7th SO "Alpha" Squadron Briefing.

Araujo walked down the corridors of the Hammer holding a datapad Task gave him with mission information and held another datapad as he made a new entry on his personal log.

"Lt Col's Log, suplement"

- "As I walk the Hammer's internal corridors and I fill this entry, I feel relatively hesitant about the mission. I don't know how well we...I can perform after being grounded for so long. No time to prepare, we are in an emergency and it seems no one else can do this. Not because we are their favorites or the best, but because we were grounded...I was grounded. "

He taps the datapad to see a notification, she replied with a heart. No words, just a heart.

- "I see Lady replied with just a reaction to my poem. Why? Is she trying to torture me? Is she unable to speak?" The silent treatment was a torture to him, death by a thousand cuts. He knew he wouldn't handle her final goodbye but he'd prefer the end to this painful withering of what was once a close relationship, his biggest strength now his most abysmal weakness. Pain in his chest and a strong desire to just stop doing anything, sitting on the floor, expecting the universe to stop, waiting for death to come.

But she replied, with a heart. There was hope.

Maybe she still loved him. Maybe she just liked the dopamine boost from his attempts to reach her, his longing for her love and company. And then he found himself standing still in the middle of the activity, suddenly realizing he was in the middle of pre-mission procedures. Trying his best to cheer himself up by considering she at least replied with a damn heart, he repeated himself his adventure would come first, she'd be ok and they'd be together after that. He needed to participate on this mission so he can redirect his attention somewhere else and get a little time to help kill the pain. - "I need to focus on the mission to make time for my pain to heal". Tapping his datapad twice, he resumed a brisk walk towards the secondary hangar as the troopers ran around taking their positions, along with crewmen, marines and everybody still able to. Mechanics were still working on multiple repairs and he looked at them, almost wishing he had to repair a mechanical device and not his heart. .

And there was no sign of any pilots.

The mental picture sent a shiver down his spine. He shrugged and tried to convince himself he was indifferent to the carnage the war against the Ishtari left. You never get truly used to war, he thought.

By the time he reached the hangar, most of the pilots were there. He quickly recognized them as he approached the group of men. Nine pilots. A quick glance as they saluted him revealed who the missing men were: Omegon, Nabrewra and ...Cremel.

- "At ease" he replied to the other with a military salute as he kept walking towards the room. He was signaling there's no time to lose but internally he didn't want to interact with anyone. As the men followed him and entered the room he started at the eyes of each one. - "Here's the situation". Pulling the datapad Task gave him, connecting it to the console and taking a deep breath, he continued - " Did you feel that lurch and the blur, right?. It is a rhetorical question. We have been interdicted". Pressing a button, the holoscreen displayed a tactical map. Presumed pirates in a flotilla of 3 capital ships are restraining FRG Implacable, CRV Narsil..." He paused briefly, lowering at his men - "...and us, the Hammer". Suddenly, a spark of determination and anger flared within him. He wanted the pirates to pay for his personal suffering - "They think they're hitting us while we are weak, but I will not let them get away with this. Hopfot and I will depart in our personal fighters. We are to defend the Hammer from the enemy fighters, inspect the enemy capitals and cover Pryde who will pilot the remaining shuttle carrying the rest of you". He could feel someone was about to raise his voice in protest but he went ahead gesturing with his hand to silence the alleged protestor - "No 'but's', no one else is available for the job". It was at moments like this where he missed the pre-Endor Imperial discipline.

- "The shuttle will infiltrate the larger enemy capital vessel, find feasible ways to neutralize it, then procure some enemy fighters and relieve them of these crafts, then assist us in defeating the enemy. Either we destroy them or we force a withdrawal but we must ensure our ships can survive and make it back to BG I. Am I clear?"

All the pilots replied - "Yes sir".

- "Good" He replied coldly, not entirely believing they did understand or rather, not entirely convinced they'd follow his plan - "Man your fighters and scramble. Dismissed!"