

Alpha Squadron: Into the Abyss - Hell Revisited #3

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

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

Two pilots approached Araujo while the rest headed towards their designated positions. Some were already in the armory receiving their respective armament for a heavy assault. The opposition you'd find on a pirate ship can be safely assumed to be strong. But they were special forces, they were trained for this kind of job.

- "What's wrong?" Horus smirked at Araujo contemplating the preparatives as he himself checked the ammo on his rifles. Pryde was close behind Horus.

- "Our commander feels something is missing," answered Pryde. Sometimes it is good that your local force sensitive reads your mind/emotions, whatever, and does the talking for you. In particular when you just don't want to interact. - "What he says" whispered Araujo. - "I just can't tell what is missing here"

- "Let's not fool ourselves, they got wind of our situation and they knew we'd be running back to Tusorix to lick our wounds, someone tipped 'em about us" Horus sardonically smiled, shaking his head looking at a nodding Pryde for confirmation. - "That's despicable" Pryde added, frowning upon it.

- "To me , it is just more obnoxious work and unnecessary risk of death...anyways, let's get going. I'll see you once this ends, hopefully." Checking his pilot suit and staring at the mechanics over his A-Wing, Araujo turned to board the ship as they looked back and nodded in approval. It was ready.

Once he was in, as the canopy closed, he turned to his right, to see an X-Wing's engines being activated, Hopfot looked at him and nodded. He nodded back. Doing the pre-flights checks and powering up the ship, he for a second forgot the fighter was using a landing gear.

Minutes later, in open space around the Hammer...

As he described in the briefing, the ships were surrounding the imperial flotilla. Two CRVs were moving to block the path of the Hammer itself. Enemy X-Wings were headed their way.

A quick glance at the onboard map display revealed they were "accompanied" by Y-Wings ...and A-Wings. The alarms activated at that precise moment, to inform him he was being locked in, and to remind Araujo that he was on the field, had tails and such tails were aiming their missiles at him. Even in his current psychological state, a mental switch was activated. His training took over. He coldly targeted the incoming missile and swiveled the craft to its starboard, reducing throttle by instinct to maximize turn ratio and be able to fine aim faster , just to find there were not one but two missiles. The pirate dog linked the fire, they wanted the Imperials dead. Most of the Galaxy did actually. Average concussion missiles weren't that much of a problem if taken care of in due time though. Firing a few shots, Araujo

eliminated the immediate threat. Rage was the immediate feeling that encroached his mind. The scum will pay.

While he weaved his way out of the attacker's vector with one hand on his control stick, he checked the map with his other hand, then he returned to look at the CMD, checking the friendly IFFs to see how his guys were doing: Two enemy X-Ws were locking on the SHU, the question came to his mind just to find Hopfot was busy engaging a third X-W -"Well, you're busy" he muttered. The A-W's old avionics wouldn't even display detailed shield strength information for the targeted craft. He always procrastinates its update - "Pryde, status?".

-"We took some hits but we were unharmed, commander. They are not exactly the best aces out there. Even with this sluggish vessel, I can easily evade their fighters". Indeed, the X-Wings could be seen missing a lot of shots... amateurs. -"Let's not underestimate them. I'll try to cover you in a bit" Araujo replied with a beam of satisfaction and relief. In that precise moment, two laser bolts illuminated his cockpit with a reddish light. That was a close call he thought. No time for emotions, he had to survive and complete the mission. His rage returned, he was meant to be somewhere else, discharged and rehabilitating. -"It seems, the hostiles are more interested in our fighters, commander", Pryde said. Feeling a bit ashamed for the lack of awareness, Araujo silently nodded and engaged his tails.

The A-W pilots weren't much more skilled than the X-Wing pilots either, but they weren't meant to be underestimated. He still had 2 tails. Targeting one of them and manually tracking the other, he pulled his fighter up, shutned energy to the engines, cut the throttle and hoped the enemy would not be as quick to mirror his maneuver. The fighter responded smoothly and the enemy wasn't fast enough to match what he was doing. One of the fighters broke to a side to try to escape his tracking and surround him and the other pulled up but didn't reduce throttle so Araujo could outmaneuver him, knowing the other wasn't aware he was the real target -"Amazing, you fell for it" he said with a smile of sadistic satisfaction at delivering pain back to the universe. They'd pay for his disgrace. All who get on his way will pay, no questions worth asking. A few moments later, Araujo locked the enemy on his reticle and appealed to his lasers to make quick work of the boogie as he kept track of the other via instruments. The enemy tried to evade him but all attempts were met with more persistence from Araujo until the pilot made a mistake: banked to the left in a steady course that could be predicted and didn't change it. Big mistake indeed.

What looked to be one of those MC80 CRS was indeed an "organically-shaped monstrosity" that surprisingly had virtually no firepower and maintained distance from the imperial ships. Araujo could take a quick glance at the vessel as he kept chasing the hostile A-W, firing over and over until the fighter's shields failed and then the hull failed too under the barrage of laser fire coming from his own fighter, when a quick succession of radio messages took place -"Alpha Squadron, this the FRG Implacable, we are moving to protect the Hammer". A sudden explosion could be seen on the port side. -"This is Alpha II-3: I got one!" exclaimed Hopfot -"Good, if you wish to get more, take note of my attackers and engage, Lieutenant Commander" immediately answered Pryde, apparently keeping his cool in the middle of the battle. -"Roger, wilco. Alright, coming your way". Not that Pryde was in immediate danger but he wouldn't take the bait to be distracted with the enemy fighters if they did not represent an immediate threat. He'd rather focus on the mission goal...and unleash his contained rage

there. All this gave Araujo some relief, as the squadron was working as a team. He felt an urge to fall back to his depression and ponder more on his own disgrace even in the middle of the fight and his mind started to drift for a brief moment...

But then, the picture in his mind was clear: the pirates sent the Y-Ws to disable the hammer, they didn't expect to interdict other ships, didn't know what else to do and continued with their original plan, the enemy CRS as decrepit as it looks, would send transports to the Hammer to plunder it once disabled perhaps. He felt he could engage them all on his own but the squadron had collective goals. He was debating between the insane activity and passively letting it all go, feeling it was all worthless and would lead to nowhere while he drowned in an ocean of pessimism and sadness. The alternative was to endlessly burn in a hostile atmosphere of rage and fury and it was all he could breathe. Channeling this fury into intelligent aggression was his challenge.

Araujo had the other A-W on his reticle by now and the pilot just couldn't shake him away. A few shots later, the second enemy A-W was turned into space dust. Another far explosion could be seen. Hopfot was doing his work. Indeed Hopfot has managed to finish all the snubfighters. -"I'll do a flyby on the CRS to get sensor readings" Hopfot offered.

-"...and let's gauge their turbolaser response, they're suspiciously quiet" Araujo added, quickly checking how the Implacable mercilessly dealt with the Y-Ws, then turning his craft to meet Hopfot who was closing on the enemy CRS. If Hopfot was free to do something else, Araujo would make sure his pilot would be tasked in the most efficient way possible.

Moments later, Hopfot interrupted the silence -"Pryde, are you receiving? I'm sending you my readings, triangulate with your own" -"Roger"

The sensors revealed most weapon emplacements were malfunctioning and the rest were deprived of their power sources. -"For whatever reason, they are unarmed. I'm going in" expressed Pryde with a bit of excitement in his voice. Now that they were in range, the SHU activated its decoy weapon.

-"Good luck," said Hopfot. Araujo tried to avoid feeling anxiety -"Let's do this. Hopfot, inspect one of the far CRVs, I'll inspect the other...see if you can destroy it" he ordered.

Suddenly, a new wave of fighters came out of the CRS' hangar -"More fighters!" Pryde exclaimed. By instinct, Hopfot and Araujo moved in and intercepted them quickly as they were leaving the hangar before Pryde could land. Two more waves followed and Araujo was wondering if there could be any fighters left for them to capture. No more fighters came, the Imperial pilots rolled back to deal with the enemy CRVs.

As he closed in, he felt that urge again to let it all go and wait for his death. Then, reluctantly, paid attention to the OTIA on his fighter's reticle alerting him of incoming enemy capital fire as he closed in range of the CRV's turbolasers. The sensors confirmed the presence of improvised gravity-well generators. "Confirmed, they have grav-well gens operating on these CRVs. Let's neut...destroy them" he chose that word as he did want blood. Hopfot acknowledged without hesitation.

Dealing with Corellian Corvettes is a thankless task. The ships are perfect for anti-starfighter screening and also light ship to ship combat. One approach is to charge them from behind, the aft section, where the engines are. Engine wash will impact the shields and a recharge will be needed, falling back is dangerous and needs to be done carefully. If the enemy turret manages to catch the fighter, the pilot needs to evade as he gets away ASAP. Flying parallel to the enemy laser trajectory is another option but requires precise maneuvering and can only be done for a short amount of time. Baiting the turrets to chase a fighter while the other attacks could be done depending on the configuration of the CRV: if it doesn't have that many turrets, it can be pulled as a tactic.

Hopfot decided to charge from behind and Araujo tried to fly in parallel to the enemy fire's trajectory. Given the average operational training and awareness of the enemy forces, both maneuvers worked this time and the pilots dealt with the CRVs shields in a matter of minutes. The Hammer closed in to assist with the hulls, piercing the ships armor with ease, even on its crippled status. A spark of compassion lit up inside Araujo's heart, imagining somehow the pain of the crew of both ships dying in fiery explosions but he remembered his own suffering and found partial satisfaction in their deaths, even if they were unrelated. "Yes, suffer. Then, die." He glacially muttered, with an almost dreamy expression. He at first felt awful for others' deaths, then felt nothing for a while and now...he starts to enjoy it.

Araujo and Hopfot successfully inspected the CRVs and shot them down with the help of the few operative cannons the Hammer had. "Task did something useful at last" Araujo thought as he was engaging one of the CRVs carrying the blasted gravity-well generator and noticed the green bolts reaching the CRV's hull, the Hammer was still able to fight and they caught on to what his unit was doing despite comms being inoperative. By this time, the shuttle was quietly approaching the CRS' hangar.

Eliminating one more wave of fighters that pretty much ignored the shuttle, and leaving the bombers for the Implacable to eliminate, the three ships were able to get closer to the hangar. The fighters were received with blaster fire from soldiers and they swept the hangar, providing cover for the SHU to land. Special care was taken not to destroy the remaining fighters available on the far end of the hangar. -"There, it is now up to you guys" Araujo pointed to Pryde and the rest of the pilots, falling back into open space with a little sense of relief. Now it was up to his men to seize the cruiser somehow. He could wait and meditate on his own pain.

Pryde and his men proceeded to take positions and battle the soldiers on the cruiser. In minutes, they seized control of a data terminal not far from the hangar and Ty Seerlan proceeded to access it as the rest provided cover in a fiery battle. The options left weren't much as they'd find out when scanning for weakness on the ship's computer system.

Seerlan reached for his comm-link and communicated to Araujo-"This is Seerlan, I'm in, and I've figured the quickest way to neutralize the ship is to hack a hyperjump order in..." he went silent and opened his eyes wide while looking at the holoscreen "but the ship is already heading for the hyperjump point, we have a couple minutes left!" Seerlan was visibly anxious, clearly not expecting this and not entirely emotionally prepared to deal with the adrenaline. Pryde briefly turned to look at him in disbelief.

"All pilots, pull back! Pull back everybody!" exclaimed Pryde. The group then retreated until they were able to seal the hangar blast doors or rather, Pryde pointed with a finger of his right hand and used the force to close a couple of them, LQC and LPhoenix shot the control terminals on two more and then they seized the remaining fighters. One of the fighters was re-wired to be remote-controlled so Pryde could recover the shuttle and bag his own fighter. Moments later, a number of X-Wings could be seen leaving the hangar along with the SHU. They were received by the other two Alpha fighters that remained in patrol around the area.

And then, just like that, the enemy CRS jumped out of the area.

"That was close" exclaimed LQC, now piloting an X-Wing.

"Well, we did it, right?" asked Milo

"Yes, enemy CRVs destroyed, enemy fighters destroyed, enemy CRS ...kinda neutralized and we got their remaining fighters" Araujo summarized. "Everyone ok? Report in!" eleven radio confirmations could be heard. All pilots were safe. "Hammer, this is Alpha 1. I understand you still don't have radio but we are heading back to the secondary hangar"

Pryde added "I think we did great" then he expressed "I would like some coffee now"

"Oh yes we did...now to finish the job on those pirates" conceded Horus. "If Task lets us do it..." he added as an afterthought.

"But first we get a bath and a meal" Araujo concluded. While the rest of the unit was totally hyped and full of adrenaline, he was mentally exhausted. "Let us see which will be the motive for Task to reprimand us now".