

“ATTENTION: ALL SQUADRONS REPORT TO YOUR QUARTERS FOR BRIEFING.
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Nothing has been right since we left Tusorix. What do they want from us now? I felt LC Gytheran’s beaming yellow eyes behind me. I could almost smell the sand in his robe even though we hadn’t been on a desert planet in some time.

“Hey Gyth, does this mean I get to stop work and go pretend to listen to something *super important*?”

“Ibana ashuna. Uttini.”

“I don’t know why I ever ask you anything. I don’t speak Jawaese. Who decided to just lump a bunch of non-humans together anyway? At least have all of us speak basic.”

The cold, metallic corridors of the Hammer began to fill with all of her residents. Engineers and technicians, ground troopers and pilots, mechanics and officers all intermingled into one writhing mass. As quickly as waves of Imperials joined the crowd, they also disappeared into their berthing. Each squadron falling off and vanishing behind the doors of their communal rooms.

It was never hard to find Lambda. All of us, aside from LCM Scottrick, aren’t human. Hell, half of us don’t even wear uniforms. They said the Imperial Navy was one-size-fits-all but that’s clearly not true. Have you ever seen them try to squeeze a Hutt into a TIE? Forget it.

The Wookiee and the Ewok were already in our quarters and the Ithorian joined Gytheran and I along the way. The initial chatter of the gathering died down as Admiral Clark’s hologram suddenly appeared in the center of the room.

“ALL SQUADRONS: STANDBY FOR AN ADDRESS FROM HIGH ADMIRAL PLIF.”

Admiral Clark’s voice was unusually shaky. A man revered for his stoicism suddenly questioning... something. A wave of unease spread throughout the berthing.

“What the hell do you think this is about?” CPT. Berkana grumbled.

“I’m not sure, Wolve,” LCM Scottrick replied, “and thanks for wearing your translation collar.”

“Good Evening everyone, some of you may know that we’re entering the Chaos. I know many of you don’t focus on what the goal is but rather on the day-to-day and I appreciate that. That said, we have come across some troubling scans recently that we must address...” High Admiral Plif, like Admiral Clark, came across on edge.

“Imperial records indicate a forward outpost in the Chaos. Our original plan upon entering the Chaos was to make contact with this outpost and utilize it as a launching point for the rest of our

journey. Unfortunately, there appear to be no signs of life and extensive structural damage. We must find out what's happened to the Imperial citizens and soldiers stationed here in the Chaos. The last recorded transmission from this outpost was more than twelve years ago. Your Wing Commanders have been looped in and will issue your orders. Thank you."

The blue-light of High Admiral Plif's hologram blinked before his projection disappeared. The low hum of the Hammer's engines seemed to rattle the entire ship. There were no conversations or snide jokes under breath. The anxieties of the chain of command transferred to all of us.

Twelve years without transmission and extensive structural damage? Nobody is going to be there. I don't know what Plif or anyone else is thinking. It's not worth the manpower to send a bunch of us down there for a game of hide and seek, especially if there's no one hiding.

The cacophony of voices, engines, and climate control systems began to fill the air. It was comforting to have something so routine back after the last thirty minutes of outright weirdness.

The Jawa waddled into the room, a stack of papers in hand, and the din of life began to quiet again. The Hammer was again being shocked back to sleep. Gytheran made his way through the berthing, giving a copy of the briefing to each of us. When he got to me, his beady yellow eyes locked with my bulbous red ones, said something in Jawaese, and walked away.

"Looks like you pulled the short deathstick there, Oberon." LCM Scottrick muttered.

I did. I was ordered to be the first out of the shuttle. Fine. My Durosian ancestors pioneered space travel! I can walk on some random planet with a missing group of soldiers... right. Right?

No more orders. No more briefings. Those of us that weren't standing now stood. Quietly, we all marched towards the hangar bay. It looked like some other squadrons were off to explore as well, but none of them wore surface uniforms. There were no stormtroopers. There were no other special forces. No squadrons attached to landing craft or shuttles, aside from us, were going to the hangars. It was just us. The outcasts. The aliens. The Hammer's punching bag, Lambda squadron.

Fine. We marched, waddled, and slithered down the corridor with the other squadrons preparing for their missions and staring at us. The Hammer, again, roared back to life. The cacophony of voices, doors, locks, and TIE engines was comforting.

"Hey, Oberon, keep your eyes open down there."

"No life signs means no bad guys, right?"

"Structural damage? Then there's still buildings. Cool!"

"Look at Lambda, bunch of weirdos."

Upon entering the hangar bay, our shuttle was being put into its launch position. LC Gytheran, MAJ TheBlackxRanger, and CPT Wolve Berkana picked up the pace so that they could be the first ones to the shuttle. I knew that I was going to be the first off the shuttle so I was in no rush to be the one of the first ones on.

The flight leaders finalized all their checks from the cockpit of our Lambda shuttle. The other flight members settled in at their various positions in the ship. I took a long walk around the perimeter. Blaster burns, pits, and craters pockmarked our shuttle. Compared to the rest of the Hammer's various flights, the Lambda shuttle seemed to match our rank in the hierarchy. We made due with what we had, but the beloved Lambda-Lambda should have been retired.

Spartan poked his little Chiss head out of the back of the shuttle, "Oberon, get on the damn shuttle! I'm not doing your job for you."

"ATTENTION: ALL SQUADRONS PREPARE FOR DEPARTURE. CLEAR THE FLIGHT PATHS."

Click, click. The buckles of my flightseat's harness clicked into place. The Lambda rumbled to life. Time to sleep.

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"Oberon, time to shine!"

Thump. Whirrrr. Thump-thump. Landing gear? There already?

The ramp creaked open. The light burst in through the cracks.

"Keep the lavatory seat warm and the Wookie pens clean. Off to find some dead friends."