

Taming the Mongrel – GN La’an, ReMob3 Submission (1008 Words)

La’an threw the oil-stained rag over the shoulder of his overalls, stepping back to check that his astromech’s matt black casing was spotless. The R5 unit was powered down and running diagnostics following another test performance during the last set of squadron exercises. A lot of his peers indulged their astromechs and actively encouraged their personalities to develop – it seemed to work for them and formed a bond that often paid dividends, but La’an had inherited the only R5 series droid in the squadron inventory along with a T-65C well into its third decade of service. Both had come with their own quirks and foibles, but R5-K9 had added to that a bad attitude with a malicious streak a mile wide.

He had fully memory wiped the droid and broken it down into parts, rebuilding its core processor from a junked R2 unit and the motivator from an R6. The R5 line had always been a low budget option with the looks of the better lines but inferior parts and systems – R5-K9 had originally been a repair unit on a Republic courier vessel until it’s capture by the Emperor’s Hammer over a decade ago. Inventory records showed the unit had bounced between squadrons in the Infiltrator Wing as it’s attitude and bad reputation had followed it. General mistreatment seemed to have worsen the droid’s flaws until it was left languishing in a store as little more than parts for salvage. The reformation of Firebird had stretched the dwindling supplied of enemy material still held by the EH, with the proverbial barrel scraped to provide enough craft and droids from mothballs for 2 infiltration squadrons to form with the Challenge’s more traditional Siemar line fighters.

K9, now christened ‘Mongrel’ in honour of its mixed breeds and canine numeric, had presented a great side project while La’an re-acquainted himself to the controls and characteristics of the X-Wing. He knew they were scorned by most TIE pilots, but he also knew full well that these fighters had been designed to be the Empire’s core fighter until politics had pushed the TIE series into prominence. In the time taken to finally start shielding TIEs and equipping them with hyperdrives for longer range operations, the Rebellion had taken the X-Wing into their own use and promptly proven Incom’s engineers absolutely correct.

There was probably a valuable lesson there, but as La’an glanced around the Challenge’s hangar at the dozens of racked TIE variants it was probably one not everyone wanted to learn. Noting a last speck of dirt on one of Mongrel’s lenses he dabbed it away, tapping the R5 on the side of its dome to wake it. A low tweet was followed by a higher note and a flash of colour as his readouts ran through an activation cycle.

“Good morning to you as well – we’ve got work to do, so if you can start the diagnostics on the flight system and propulsion I’ll start visual checks. Happy?” La’an smiled as a series of high pitch chirps indicated agreement. The parts from an R2 had turned his droid into a real character – he could see why his colleagues indulged their units after all.

“Glad to hear it – let’s take it slow and steady, any issues just shout them out.” Mongrel tweeted again before trundling off to the rear of La’an’s fighter to interface with it directly. The matt black paintjob and durasteel accents had been an indulgence, but he’d had time to burn and a few favours with the engineering department to call in.

He’d need a few more of those favours called in to get his fighter where he needed it to be. The pristine orange and grey scheme hid more problematic systems, most of which he would have expected of course from a 25-year-old craft that had been fighting for its entire life. The port S-foils

had a sluggish servo, while one of the KX9's had a periodic barrel heating issue that suggested the need for a replacement before it failed. The more complex issue was the firing of all four fusial thrust engines, with spiking power levels in the number 3 engine slowing his launch time by up to 12 seconds as he ran through a more cautious start routine. Something was misaligned, but he was hoping to correct it today with the help of some of the older maintenance engineers who had lived and breathed these fighters for their entire careers. It would probably cost him a keg and some mild ribbing, but he'd take it gladly if it corrected at least one of his fighter's snags.

Walking around the hull he let an ungloved hand run across the flight surfaces and weapons, checking for any spalling of the plates or any subtle sense of 'wrong' that might indicate an issue. He checked all intakes and sensor ports, the launch tubes of his proton torpedo launcher, hydraulics lines, cabling and his astromech's cradle with a little gymnastics and the aid of a boarding ladder. Dropping back to the deck he crouched to check the landing gear in detail, noting the fraying of one cable and a slight warp to the stabiliser on his forward gear – he must have landed heavily during their last stop. He made a mental note to check the repulsorlift calibration as he couldn't recall feeling it. That being said he was still fairly new to the T-65C and was probably treating it more robustly based on its vaunted reputation and tales of its endurance – he could probably do with dialing it back a touch. He recalled the experience of flying an A-Wing as Green CMDR, with the first flight having been comparable to strapping himself to a jacked-up concussion missile. There had been a lot of lessons to learn there and Firebird would be the same he had no doubt.

A chirping from the back of the fighter called for his attention, so snapping out of his moment of reflection he called back and readied himself for whatever problem Mongrel had just identified.