

Part I: A Pilot is Always Prepared

Opening an aft panel on his gunboat, he inspected the wiring. Using a hand held micro scanner with one hand and a palm sized monitor in the other, each and every connection was checked and double checked. There was a buzz going about the low ranks of a big movement. These suspicions were confirmed when they met up with the ISD II Hammer now floating a few kilometers away.

"Good, everything checks out. Now to try my modifications."

Spiffy liked to add a bit of his own flair to whatever standard issue ship he was assigned. It gave the ship soul. Even if that soul was temperamental. He turned around and pulled out a small grey box. Turning his attention back to the open panel, he began cutting and soldering in the connections for the new box. Once complete, he mounted the box on the inside of the panel cover and place it back.

"Alright, time to see if the lights will turn on."

He walked around to the cockpit and opened the hatch. Reaching in, Spiffy flipped on the electronic systems. A pleasing purr came from the Iotek reactor.

"Oooooo pretty lights" Spiffy smiled from ear to ear. The glittering screens and indicator lights began their normal warmup routine. Everything seemed to work so far. He leaned in to watch the rest of the sequence. Then over the din of the hangar bay, he heard a voice all too familiar.

"Lieutenant Commander Spiffy, I hope you aren't trying another one of your modifications without my permission." Commander Len Eode sternly remarked.

Surprised, Spiffy attempts to stand at attention and bumps his head on the hatch. Falling out onto the floor.

"No, no, no, no, no! I wouldn't *dream* of doing such and act buddy! Especially after the last time when you had to fish me out of an asteroid crater. You have to admit the Idea is still a good one though, by running a repeater around a hyper drive motivator-

"Spiffy"

"-we could easily add an extra parsec to the range of-

"*Spiffy*" Len glared at him, "It is Commander Len to you..." he raised one eyebrow, "...and your cockpit is smoking."

Spiffy wheeled around looking at the smoking cockpit. "Uhhhh" There was a spark, then a bang as the panel Spiffy just worked on flew off. The gunboat's reactor gave a heavy sigh then shut down.

"That...is *not* supposed to happen." Spiffy tried to chuckle but was cut off by a second loud BANG of the panel impacting on the wall. Len was not amused. Spiffy stood up and saluted Len, "Commander, I am fully ready to explain my actions."

"We will talk about it later, right now I need you to come with me to the meeting room on deck 5."

"Yes sir"

The two went to leave the hangar deck. Len began to brief him on the meeting.

“As we have all suspected, something big is going down. We still have a war to fight and a galaxy to keep safe.” The duo rounded the corner and entered the elevator. As the doors closed behind them, Len continued, “Orders have finally come down from the admiralty. Sigma has been given a new mission.” The elevator stops and they exit. The two walk in silence, Spiffy can hardly hold back his excitement. He could not wait to prove his worth. Ever since his arrival on the ISD II Warrior, he had hoped for that one moment. Len reached for the keypad to open the door and paused. “What exactly did you do to your gunboat?” There was a silence for a few seconds the Spiffy began to explain.

“You see, the word going around is that the Void are back and I was trying to add a new sensor array to help me find and target them in nebula...”

Len turned to look at Spiffy, he was surprised something so useful didn’t come with a catch. Then Spiffy smiled and continued,

“...oh and it makes for a killer light show. Once the target is located, something like 30 different lights will flicker.”

Len cracked a smile. There’s the Spiffy he knew from training. Times may have changed, but his shenanigans sure hadn’t. They entered the meeting room. CPT Crix was the only one there. He stood as they entered.

“Sir!” Crix said sternly. Len nodded and motioned for them all to sit. He turned on the projection, which showed a map of the Trans-Vulta sector.

“Men, the Void are not operating in the Mid Rim. It is the New Republic using the abandoned Void facilities. Specifically, a few located in the Ryyk Nebula. They are terrorizing the trade routes through this sector. If they aren’t put to a stop and the NR gain control of this sector, it would give them easy transport between the Inner and Outer Rim.”

Len looked at his two flight leaders. This was a big threat to the Empire. If this guerilla warfare tactic works, it would mean the NR could get anywhere. The war would escalate again. Plus, it would divide the Mid Rim. None of which is good news for the Empire.

The map zooms in to a nebula, “Inside the Ryyk Nebula, there is an old Void platform used for fast repair and resupply. The NR have been repurposing it as a base of operations.” As Len continued the map animates his words, “We will be providing the big guns. Our first task is to destroy anything on that platform that isn’t ours. A strike team will arrive before us to draw their fire and destroy the turrets. Once space is clear, the second task is to provide cover so a boarding party can begin the internal assault. Our third task is to destroy the platform, if the internal assault fails.”

A silence falls between the three of them. The NR operating this aggressively means they are getting bolder. Pressure was mounting for the Empire to ensure the safety of the Central Sectors. Failure would not look good for anyone.

“When do we leave Len?” Spiffy asked.

“You have five hours to prepare.” Len answered. “You are to run full diagnostics on all major systems. Make sure all warheads are loaded and ready; I want to be prepared for anything the NR might try and

pull. We now know they are operating in this sector so expect a counter attack to break a hole for them to escape through. Do not give the NR that chance.”

Crix looks down from the projection, “What kind of weapons do they have?”

“The reported trade attacks have suggested at least a couple dozen X-wing, and A-wing class ships. We have no hard data on the exact amount operating out of the platform. The nebula makes it difficult to get clean readings.” Len was worried. He knew he could be sending his men into a possible death trap. From talk with his fellow Commanders, this wasn’t the only death trap pilots might walk into. Maybe not even the last. A necessary risk any TIE pilot takes. Just you hope that when the Bantha fodder hits the fan, you have the tools to come out on top. The meeting ends, CPT Crix and LCM Spiffy leave while Len stays to go over the laundry list of things he has to do before joining his own flight for the upcoming battle.

Part II: Please put your Trays in the Upright position

Back in the hangar, Spiffy collected his panel and grey box which had lodged themselves in the wall. On his way back over to his gunboat, he stopped by Lieutenant Colonel Emrys’s gunboat. There he found the LC, whistling away as he wiped down the standing tail. Spiffy approached him, “Hey-yo Emrys! I just got out of a meeting with Len...”

No response. Spiffy frowned, he knew the LC was doing it on purpose. Spiffy coughed, in his most official voice he could muster without laughing, he tried again. “Lieutenant Colonel Emrys, I just got out latest mission from Commander Len.”

Emrys stopped cleaning and turned around. He hopped off the horizontal wing of his gunboat and looked Spiffy in the eye. “Oh? And what might this mission be?” Spiffy handed Emrys a data pad. Emrys quickly scanned it over and handed it back. “Looks like the Ryyk Nebula will make for an interesting proving grounds. Are you ready to lead me into it Spiffy?”

“Yes, of course! Can’t you tell from my serious and official sounded voice?” Spiffy responded. They both smiled then laughed. Returning to his natural voice Spiffy said, “Alright LC Emrys, we have five hours to prep. I will check in again with you when I finish fixing my own mess.”

Spiffy returned to his gunboat, throwing the grey box back in with the rest of his tools. Kneeling in front of the panel once again, he fixed all the fried connections. Grabbing a hammer he bent it back to the original shape. Finally gave it a good wipe down and placed it over the wires. He sighed, “Another time buddy. Then we can get those flames you always wanted.” Spiffy walked back around to the cockpit. This time opening the hatch a bit farther he jumped into the seat and once again began the startup sequence. There was still considerable smoke in the cockpit but the hangar deck air filtration system quickly sucked it out. The screens flickered on one by one, all the indicator lights went through their initializations. “Oh good you still turn on. Even *after* our small snafu. Now to see if you can still speak.” He flipped on the lotek reactor and began the warmup cycle on the dual line Cygnus 4k7 engines. A low hum filled the air as power began to flow. It was almost egging him to push it to the limit. He wrapped his hand around the control stick and began to run through the basics. “Navigation...check. Avionics....check. Shields...check. Engines...check.” His hands flew across the controls without a second thought. All his training for the TIE corps made sure this routine could be done blindfolded. “Cup

holder...che-WAIT A MINUTE!” Spiffy’s hand swung at the air in the cockpit where his custom cup holder was. He pouted, then stuck his head out of the cockpit and shouted, “DAMN IT LEN! GET YOUR OWN CUP HOLDER!”

Part III: By the Book

Five hours had passed. The three Sigma flights were lined up waiting for final instructions from Commander Len as they dawned their flight suits. Spiffy joined the line and finished getting his suit together. The sounds of buckles clacking and air pressurizing was all that could be heard. They all knew this wasn’t going to be an easy mission. Taking the time to put on the gear in silence could be the last bit of quiet they hear for a long time. The hangar door opens and Commander Len walked in followed by Colonel Frown.

“ATTENTION!” Shouted Len, joining the line at the end he saluted Colonel Frown. The rest of the Squad copied him. Standing at attention waiting for their final briefing. Colonel Frown stood in front of them, arms behind his back. An R2 droid rolls up next to him and projects a schematic of the Ryyk Nebula with the platform lighting up.

Frown cleared his throat, “The platform you are attacking is an XQ5 class. Meaning there are six turbolaser batteries and six laser cannons. What we can gather from the general schematic of this platform class can also hold 3 squadrons. From our previous intelligence on NR platforms, there is most likely two x-wing squads and an A-wing squad. The nebula is blocking any kind of long range scan to give us any conclusive data. Kappa Squadron will be providing your escort to the platform. Once there, begin your bombing runs.” The projection closed. Frown looked back at the squad. “After this, we have no real data. Expect the unexpected. Dismissed!”

“SIR YES SIR” The wing responds. Running to their craft. Engines hummed to life. Sigma squad formed up on their Commander. Leaving the hangar, they were joined by Kappa squadron’s flights one and two. Leaving the range on the Warrior, Kappa Commander came in over the coms.

“Lieutenant Colonel Repulsor here, time to go into the fray. One last systems check, coms channel on?”

“Read you loud and clear Rep.” Len responds. “All Sigma pilots, engage hyperdrives. Follow behind Kappa. Keep your scanners at max.”

Repulsor came on over the coms again. “We are going light speed, see you on the other side.” The stars stretch back as the five wings leave the Warrior.

As they exit light speed, the scanners go dark. Spiffy ran his fingers on the controls. “Damn it, nothing! Anyone else getting data?”

Captain Crix came in over coms, “nothing here too. Guess we are going to rely on visuals.”

Flying closer to the platform Repulsor comes in again, “We got company. Here come the x-wings. 2 and 10 o’clock!”

Kappa flights 1 and 2 split off to take them on. Len continues to lead Sigma towards the platform. "Keep an eye out the third squadron. We are approaching firing range."

The computers on Sigma's gunboats lock on, "300 kilometers till within range." Blips the computer.

The platform's defenses begin to fire at Sigma. "Power to front shields!" Len shouts. The flights scramble to dodge the fire. Drawing ever closer. The computer blips again,

"200 kilometers till within range,

150 kilometers...

100 kilometers...

50 kilometers..."

The platform's defenses focus more on Sigma. The lasers get denser.

"...20 kilometers...

10 kilometers...

5 kilometers..."

Sigma's gunboats ready their first salvo. The computer blips stop and the first salvo flies forward. Multiple missiles land taking out a portion of the platform's defenses. Flying over, Sigma begins to turn for the second run. Suddenly a huge salvo of rockets and lasers flies over Sigma.

"It's the a-wing! Sigma, defense pattern omega!" splitting up, the sigma flights switch targets at break apart. Flights 2 and 3 swing around and fire of their ion cannons. Crossing their fire in front of the a-wings. While flight 1 unloads a salvo of laser right down the a-wing squad. With the a-wings taken care of, Sigma refocuses on the platform. A second salvo of missile is launched taking out the rest of the platform's defenses. Long range comms come through, "This is the lambda class shuttle Warthog, and we are coming in to land the boarding party."

Len responds, "All clear out here Warthog, come on in."

Repulsor calls in, "Kappa is coming around to follow you in."

The shuttle approaches the platform with not resistance. Sigma and Kappa begin their patrol. Trying to get any scan for incoming ships. The nebula still makes any scan past a few kilometers impossible.

"Spiffy, any luck with your scanner? I got nothing." Len asked.

Spiffy works the scanner controls on his Gunboat. "Still nothing! Come ON!" Spiffy furiously taps away. "Come on baby....you can do it. It is just a metallic based nebula..." The scanner doesn't show any sign of improvement. He stops typing and reaches under the dash pulling out a few wires. "Maybe if I rewire the ion engine's reserves to the scanner..." The scanner blips to life. "YES!!" Spiffy shouts. Then the scanner burns out. "SON OF A---"

"I guess that means no luck?" Len chimes in. "We got to keep our wits about us. More should be coming to answer their distress calls."

Without missing a beat, a salvo of ion blasts comes at Sigma crossing their path from 4 and 8 o'clock. "B-wing squads!" Yells Repulsor on the coms. Kappa squadron comes about to take them. Six b-wings appear through the nebula. Followed by two more squads of x-wings.

"Sigma! Scramble!" Len keyed in through the coms. The dogfight continued for hours. Kappa and Sigma had the flight pretty much wrapped up when the ground crew came in on coms. "We have control of the platform. All hostiles Neutralized. Unfortunately we cannot help you with the fighters. You did too good of a job on this cannons."

"It's ok, Kappa has this under control." Repulsor responded. "We will provide cover for you until we can get new defenses installed."

After mopping up the last of the fighters, Len came back through on coms, "Sigma, form up! Time to head home. Thanks for the support Kappa."

"Anytime Len, You owe us drinks when we get back to the Warrior." Repulsor replied.

"We shall see. Sigma, jump to light speed."

Part IV: No Rest for the Sum of all Fears

Upon landing, Sigma began reloading and refueling. All routine. Spiffy grabbed the grey box off the tool pile and went back to his gunboat.

"Hmm, seems that this old girl's power supply can't handle my mod. Probably also explains why she rejected it so hard." Spiffy threw the box back on the tool chest and sat down. Wiping the sweat off his brow. The whole sigma crew had not even changed out of their flight suits. After landing, their commander Len barely shut his engines down before being called into the briefing room again.

LC Emrys walked over and sat down next to him. "Well, we pulled off another mission. Good job out there."

"Thanks Emrys," Spiffy wiped the sweat off his collar and continued, "I am sure we are not out of the fire just yet. You saw Len run off. Out of the frying pan..."

Emrys pats Spiffy on the back and stood up pointing towards the door, "...and fire just returned."

Len came storming back in. Holding a data pad. Another worried look in his eye called across the hangar, "Gents gather around, our next mission just came through. That second wave of fighters came from the planet Myrkr. Seems as though the New Republic set up a new base of operations there and was using it to supply the platform we just relieved them of. They are sending a constant stream of fighters towards Kappa. We need to punch through their line, reach Myrkr orbit and destroy this..." Len turned the data pad towards the rest of his crew. Spiffy squinted a bit and rubbed the soot from his eyes.

"...is that a *Dreadnaught-class*?"

"Yes Spiffy, our plan is to punch straight through. Once we take out the cruiser, the surface base will have nothing to protect it from assault. It will also lighten the load on Kappa."

The Sigma Crews looked at each other. Len sensed something was off, "It is nothing we can't handle. We are the Sum of all Fears!"

Still silence. Spiffy spoke up finally, "Len, you are my friend. How does the Empire expect two wings of Assault gunboats, and one wing of TIE advances to take down a *cruiser*?"

Len smiled, "They don't. They expect two fully loaded TIE Scimitar Assault Bomber wings and one TIE Advanced wing. Men, double time to hangar nine! We are being reassigned to new ships as a squad."

Sigma cheered, they all had trained in the TIE Scimitar's on the simulator in hopes of better serving their role.

Upon arriving, the pilots of Sigma had already finished donning the rest of their flight gear. With very little time to admire their new ships, they strapped in and set off for Myrkr.

"Ahh....smells like new burnt leather." Spiffy remarked over the coms.

"I'd agree with you Spiffy if I understood *how* you can smell that." Replied Crix.

"Small chatter aside, it is time to test these bombers out. Sigma style. Engage Hyperdrives and jump on my mark." Len commanded.

"WE ARE THE SUM OF ALL FEARS!" Replied the squad.

"Mark" Slipping away into space, Sigma jumped towards Myrkr.

Part V: Acid Rain

Upon exiting light speed, the squad found themselves in orbit of the planet Myrkr. Their long range scanners blipped, signaling the approaching cruiser from the other side. The only thing keeping the cruiser from unleashing a huge salvo was the big green marble.

Len came back on coms, "Alright, form up and prepare for the fighters. Keep them out of range of the cruiser and thin their ranks. Once we cut her fighter support down, come in low from the atmosphere using the magnetic field as a barrier for our approach. Once close enough, Sigma 2 and 3 will bomb the cruiser. The rest of Sigma 1 and I will keep the fighters busy."

[blah blah blah, battle ensues, see battle 2: Seek and Destroy brief for enemies and whatnot. During this mission Sigma discovers and orbiting trade platform running supplies to the surface.]

Part VI: Starvation

Leaving Light speed, now approaching the ISD II Warrior chirped the computer. Spiffy awoke from his nap. Feeling slightly more refreshed. He attempted to stretch his arms and legs in the cramped cockpit of his TIE Scimitar with little success. He hadn't even had time to install the all-important cup holder.

Returning to manual control as Spiffy and the rest of Sigma left light speed they saw their home, the Warrior floating in front of them. Len radioed in,

"This the Sigma Squad, permission to refuel and resupply." Len typed in the clearance codes and waited for a response.

Colonel Frown came on over coms "This is the ISD II Warrior, Sigma you are cleared to land, refuel, and resupply. I have your next mission."

Once docked, Sigma squad piled out of their ships and made their way to the briefing room. Colonel Frown walked in and inserted his code cylinders. The doors locked shut and a projection of Myrkr appeared. Frown cleared his throat, "Sigma, you have been doing adequate. Although I am skeptical about your overall effectiveness in the new bombers. Do not fear, for your discovery of the trade platform will give you all a chance to prove it was worth spending the money." He walked around the projection and stood behind the lectern. The planet spun around until the platform was in sight. Frown continued with the briefing, "We have reason to believe that this trade platform is the main way the New Republic is supplying its ground forces. Being that so many goods go through here, it is easy to smuggle in whatever the NR needs. Your mission is to patrol the trade vessels approaching the platform for smuggled NR supplies. Destroy any that you find." Frown looked sternly at Sigma squad, "Normally I would rather send a more suitable squadron to take care of this but the NR most likely have strong ties with the traders who run the platform. Meaning they are most likely armed and dangerous. If they attempt to attack you, destroy the platform. Either way, if you succeed you have given me slightly more proof of letting you keep your new toys. You leave as soon as your ships are ready. Dismissed." Frown removed his code cylinders, the doors unlocked and Sigma made their way back to the hangar.

[blah blah blah, see battle 3: Starvation brief, fly back to Myrkr. Perform scanning, find smuggled good and destroy them. Platform calls Len angry about destroyed trade ships. Len attempts to reason with them, no good, Sigma is fired upon. Len warns them of the consequences of continued assault, not heeded, forced to destroy platform. NR brings support from surface to defend platform, Sigma defeats them.]

Part VII: No Escape

With the platform destroyed, Len radioed back to the Warrior, "Sigma to Warrior, mission accomplished. All targets destroyed."

"Good, though I prefer we do not destroy possible assets in the future." Responded Colonel Frown, "I have an update for you from our ground forces. Seems we have been successful in driving the Republic off planet. They are planning to escape in three Delta-class DX-9 Transports. With their departure time unknown, we can only assume it to be soon. Your final mission is to stop these transports from jumping to light speed. Reports are coming in of an ion cannon planet-side. The Warrior will not be able to assist. However, we will be standing by to intercept any that get through. If you pilots wish to keep your new toys, I suggest you do not let any through."

"Yes sir, understood." Len turned off the long range receiver and switched over to squad coms. "Alright men, you hear the Colonel. Let's earn these wings! Form up on me. We are going around."

Forming up, Spiffy and Crix checked their remaining payloads. "I got one full rack of concussion missiles left, a handful of thermal detonators, and about a dozen proton grenades. What about you Crix?"

"Similar, let's make them count."

As the planet spun below, they screamed around the northern hemisphere. Scanners at max for any sign of launch. Len's screen lit up, "Launch detected, three transports leaving the surface." He punched in the coordinates and transmitted them to the rest of Sigma. "They should be appearing at our 2 o'clock low."

As Sigma approached the coordinates, rounding the horizon, they watched as three Delta-class transports broke atmosphere, turned away from them and started heading out.

"Oh, no you don't!" said Len, diving in on the trio. He released a tight spread of laser fire across all three, weakening their shields. Crix and Spiffy were close behind, firing off their laser cannons as well. The three transports broke formation and began to fire upon Sigma. Pulling around, Sigma came back at them for a second run.

"Forward shields up, lock on a hearty salvo. Let's make this a one and done." Len commanded. Approaching fast, Len fired off another burst of laser taking out the shields for the first transport. Moments later, two missiles flew past him connecting with the transport's hull.

"YES!! One down, two to go!" Screamed Spiffy.

As they passed over, the transports stop firing and began to retreat. As Sigma came in again, they were greeted with X-wings and A-wings. Forced to break off, Sigma pulled up hard.

[Blah blah blah, rest of the battle. Sigma flights hard to break through the fighters and destroy the last two transports. Only able to destroy one more and severely weaken the third. The remaining NR fighters, retreat with the transport. Sigma returns to the Warrior tired and worried about that Frown will take away the Scimitars.]

Part VIII: I Can Count My Favors on One Hand

Touching down in Hangar nine, Spiffy slumps out of the pilot seat. Detaching his air hoses and removing his helmet. Drenched in sweat, he powers down his ship and climbs out. Joining up with the rest of Sigma. Tired and beat they made their way toward the barracks.

Three hours later, Spiffy was startled awake by the sound of the ship comms chirping. He sat up in his bunk and smacked his head on frame from the bed above. Rubbing his forehead he slumped out of bed and made his way to the com panel. Pressing the call button he groggily answered, "Flight Leader Spiffy here..."

"Spiffy, it is Len, come meet me in my office."

Spiffy rubbed his eyes, "now?"

"Now"

Taking a deep breath in, Spiffy stood up straight, "Okay, just let me put some pants on..."

Spiffy sat on the edge of his bed and pulled on his pants. Walking over to his locker, he took out a shirt, smelled it, shivered, and put it back. Reaching in again, he grabbed a second shirt and put it on. Donning the rest of his duty uniform, he took one last look at his bed, "I will be back soon." Then left the barracks.

Arriving at Commander Len's office, Spiffy knocked. The door opened and Crix was already sitting there. He had a very serious look. Entering, Spiffy turned toward Len sitting behind his desk holding a data pad.

"Len, I bet I can summarize everything you are about to say."

Len motioned to the empty chair next to Crix, "Sit down Spiffy."

"We worked our asses off, didn't successfully finish the mission. So Frown got upset and wrote a fifty page debrief as to why we suck."

Crix chuckled. "That is the same feeling I have Len. I hope there is a better reason for waking us up."

Len smiled, put the data pad down on the desk and looked at his flight leaders. "That sounds pretty much like the gist of it. Except there is one twist in the end..." He slid the data pad over to Crix who picked it up and scrolled through.

Crix's eyes widened, "You are kidding me..."

"What, what let me see!" Spiffy grabbed the pad from Crix and skimmed through. A huge smile slowly crept across his face. He threw his hands up and jumped out of the chair, "HECK YES!!!! ALL THOSE LONG NIGHTS IN THE TRAINING SIMULATOR PAID OFF!!!" With renewed energy Spiffy began to dance around the small office.

Len laughed, "It seems our CO feels we deserve the new birds. Much to Colonel Frown's disappointment." Len reached under his desk and pulled out a bottle of Corellian whiskey and poured three tumblers. "Congratulations men. I wouldn't want to fly with anyone else."

