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shut the fuck up and get coloring

**TIME: 11:39zulu (local 11:38mst)**

"Holy shit, Bill! You're fucking kidding!" Shouts Maria over the tacnet link as Nicole screeches up in Maria's glider.

Nicole barks, "Get in!"

With Maria running around the glider to the passenger side, Bill radios back through the link, ["Like, we just found out, like literally minutes ago! Are we gonna hit 'em?"]

Maria hops in and Nicole is already pulling away before Maria closes her door, "I can't believe they're cutting cookies again! If we put it off do ya think we'd be able to launch against it in a day or two?"

With Nicole maneuvering the glider into the adjoining field Bill replies, ["Scott and I agree, there is no way after today. If we pull our people out there's no goin' back."]

Maria tells Nicole, "Geisha Hut on Nufa, it's now or never."

Nicole gives her that *stupid question* look and, "Ah, now!"

Maria sees the reporters by first base and she tells Nicole to, "Stop!" Then to Bill over the net as she jumps out of the car and starts running to the news team, "Bill, we're doin' this but hang for a second, okay?" Then to the reporters, "How old are you guys?"

Opie says, "I'm twenty-two."

The camera operator, Yumi Oshiro goes, "Twenty-four."

Maria puts her hands out, "It's gonna be dangerous. I mean *you can maybe die* dangerous. We're hitting a Geisha Hut! If you come out of this alive it'll be a *hell* of a story!"

Opie and Oshiro didn't have to be told twice and, dragging spare octodroid cameras, they dive into the back seat as Maria hops in front, "Okay, Bill, we got two reporters from the local news outlet with us! They'll need body armor."

As the glider quickly drifts into the adjoining field, Bill radios, ["U-Tau launches in ten minutes. Nufa launches in thirty and we're short a hand full of HWG pilots for that one but we're lookin'."] ]

With the glider's nose now pointing skyward, Nicole shouts to the reporters, "Hang on!"

Maria grunts as she fights the g-forces as they blast into the sky like a rocket, "You got Nicole and myself."

["No fucken' way! Uh-uh, boss lady!"]

Maria snorts, "Bill, that's the direct order from your one and only Über Führer. Got that! We'll be there in about six, out." She then ties into Vossler who was waiting, "Voss, where's my tactical?"

["Ah..."] Vossler fumbles then says, ["They're workin' on it."]

Now a thousand meters up Nicole pulls the glider into a sharp rotation and kicks the throttle open—where the ship blasts into a mach speed ballistic arc towards the Spike over ninety kilometers away.

Hearing the commotion over the link Maria says, "Sounds like your people are yacking it up. How 'bout you tell 'em to shut the fuck up and get coloring, hu? Get me your feed!"

Voss is a bit frazzled, ["The situation is nuts! Very fluid! You heard we now have to throw together two rapid reaction teams that were not planned for, right?"]

"Sorry to add to your plate, Voss, but I need the tactical the second I get to CIC. We'll be there in about five or six, out."

As the glider reaches top speed, and the severe g-forces lighten up, Nicole says to Opie and Oshiro to, "Guys, transmit the video and notes you have over to your editor, just in case."

Oshiro says, "We're already on it."

Maria looks at Nicole, "I don't get my tactical...yet." She glances over her shoulder, "Send the contact information I gave you. Your editor will know what to do with it if you don't come back."

Looking out the window, and with nothing to do, Maria asks, "By the way, BYU boy, where'd you do your mission?"

Opie openly laughs, "Not a marmoset."

Maria blinks several times and looks back again, "Oh?"

"Told my family to fuck the faith. At least I got to finish my degree before getting cut off."

"Hu!" Maria shrugs back, "I'm still Catholic."

Opie is surprised, "Seriously? I'm sorry."

"Superficially, for my grandmother!" After that protest, Maria quietly adds, "And now that my mother has become my grandmother my sister and I will have to wait her out too—and my sis happens to be a priest of all things!"

"No shit? That's a scream!"

"We go through the motions, but I'm not so ego-maniacal to think that God would be interested in listening to my shit."

"Sentiment shared." Opie thinks for a second, "I dunno about Catholics, but Kolobsters think they're so fucken' special, and now that the herd is thinning it's doubly so. And, while we're sharing, my mother still treats her twat like a clown car. I was the first of eight thigh-sprouts and the bitch is knocked up again." Opie then adds introspectively, "Sounds like I got unresolved issues, hu?"

Oshiro snorts, "Ya think?"

Maria smirks, "All God's children 'as got issues."

Oshiro knows who Maria is and she mentions her name for Opie's benefit, "Marshal Ramirez, we're broadcasting live, right?"

Opie mouths the words '*Marshal Ramirez*' to Oshiro as Maria replies, "You bet you are."

Opie pipes up, "I'm not a broadcast journalist!"

Maria laughs once, "You are now, Wonderbread!"

Oshiro pokes him, "You took a class in it."

He protests, "That's right, Yoshi. I took...a-class."

Maria smirks, "Then you'd better flex your chops, son, because in a short while you'll be live-at-five in all markets!"

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Watching the first rapid reaction force launch, two kilometers below, Colonel Karan of the RAF, asks, "You say a Geisha Hut, aye?"

Vossler confirms, "Yup, Colonel, and we could use the help. And, you have to admit, it is for a good cause."

"Then I say it would be amiss of me to not to authorize it." Colonel Karan turns to the six RAF Warthog pilots standing behind him, in unarmed JACCs, and asks, "You scallies up for a tumble?"

The RAF crews originally came to pick up the first delivery of their new HWGs, but now they've been offered the chance to join in the fight out at Nufa (HIP20842) and they actually give a cheer.

The Colonel turns to Victoria Wilson, "All except you, Major. You'll have to sit this one out."

Victoria scowls, "Group Captain, sir, I'm in the service for another week, nor am I entitled to special treatment."

"As your superior officer I'm holding you in reserve, Major."

"Aside the fact that I am the senior combat officer here..." Victoria then says in her best monarchial parlance, "We *are* your queen and as your queen we demand that you to order us into action."

"No!" Maria has just stepped into the CIC and she heard the exchange, "What are we doing here, people?" She motions to Victoria for a side-bar, "Major, you gotta sec?"

Out of earshot Victoria says, "I need this."

Maria snarls slightly, "Ah, I'm going—you're not!"

"Maria, love, don't make me beg. You need HWG drivers and here we are! And these are some stonking good pilots!"

*So, we ARE on a first name basis now*, thinks Maria as she just shakes her head at Victoria, "Okay, Vic, it's bat-shit crazy for me even to consider taking you, but what if you die, hu?"

"So what? It'll spare me from what's coming. Anyway, my sister thrives in all the pomp and stuffiness. She can have it."

"Then I'm off the hook, then. Right?"

"Guaranteed!" Victoria then adds, "And, I swear, if we make it out I'll drop to my knees and blow your brains out."

Maria mouths the word *okay*, then says, "Dually noted."

Victoria coyly adds, "You could use a good snogging."

"Let's hope it's a milk-run." Shaking her head, Maria then realizes that something is missing. She turns around and throws her hands out while shouting, "Goddam it! Where's my—"

Suddenly, the tactical hologram Maria was waiting for flashes into being overhead, and instead of looking up at it she closes her eyes and paths the file through her mind—absorbing the data in real time. Maria really hates this interface but the time restraints imposed upon them requires her to put personal phobias aside and work with the technology the way it was intended to be used. Vossler is amazed that Maria is accepting the download and keeps attentively quiet.

Maria's eyes open and they flutter slightly as she turns to Vossler and says with a nod, "Damned good work, Voss."

She then motions for Vossler and a handful of the "geezers"

retreads working the Spike to follow her. They reach a closet and she cracks it open with a sign. They step in and seconds later they come out with BR1 rail guns and bandoliers of magazines for each of the pilots and their WSOs who are inspecting their new HWG drop ships down at the airfield.

Maria hands Victoria a bandolier of magazines then starts strapping a rail gun to her all-the-while saying, "These are the K models in six-point-eight. You've trained with the four-seven-five and they are exactly the same."

Vic smiles, "Little kick—bigger boom."

"Exactly!"

Nicole motions for Maria to follow, "The lift is here with our waldos so let's go!"

With Colonel Karan staying behind in the CIC everybody else beat feet for the freight elevator as Nicole and Maria frantically rip off their clothes on the run. As they pile in the British pilots help lift the two into their JACC fighting suits while the elevator starts to drop like a rock. Most everyone nowadays are desensitized to people being naked but Victoria, who was not helping them mount up, did manage to sneak a glance at both and this was not lost on Maria.

Maria then gets a prompt from Jacob trying to radio her so she takes the call and snarls, "Wha', *pandejo!* Whaddaya want?"

Through the tacnet, Jacob asks, ["Before I jump are you sure you don't want my finger to peel off and fly CAP for you?"]

Maria's huffs, "We can't claim the mission as humanitarian if there is a fighter escort overhead and, for what it's worth, we will be armed to the god-damned teeth so what's your problem?"

["There's a battalion of Security Services on Nufa and that concerns me."]

"No, that concerns me! What concerns you is the fight *you* are going to. Get our people outta there and if you free up any HWGs then send those my way. We may need 'em. Copy?"

["Copy, copy!"]

"Oh and, Graves..." Maria was going say something nice but reverts to her old gnarly self, "Get your ass back in one piece or I'm gonna squat over your corpse!"

Jacob laughs over the radio then adds, ["You got it, Ramirez. Fly friendly! Out."]

As Maria and Nicole quickly spot check each other's suits, and as the elevator starts to bottom out, Maria says, "All right, everybody,

listen up! The four SA drop ships will go in on point and orbit the AO as forward screens. Kiel will be in command of the AO..."

She snaps her canopy on, switches to the speaker system, "You brit drivers pick your two best crews to hang back for close air support and the other four will go in for the extraction."

Victoria volunteers, "Alfie and I, we'll be conking overhead."

"That'll do!" The elevator opens and they fly from the lift and race through the bay door from under the Spike, and as they land beside Michelle Kiel and Angela Simmons, between the SA and the British drop ships, Maria asks, "So, you two up for this?"

Under the ever watchful cameras of Opie and Oshiro, standing by the nearest RAF gunship and shooting pre-mission footage of them, Simmons nods towards Victoria, "That who I think it is?"

Kiel nods, "Yup, Klicks, it is."

Victoria has stepped up and does a slap palms with a knuckle knock with Kiel, "Hey ho, Guns! Ready for a dustup?"

Kiel smiles, "Make me proud, Vic."

"Vic, hang back..." Maria claps her hands and shouts, "All ya'll let's saddle up! This show hits the road in three!"

Simmons manages to get a double-knuckles from Victoria as she scatters with the rest leaving Maria and Victoria, whereas Victoria notices a low-visibility image of the Ewa symbol from the Order of the Smile and points to it, "Mar, I was under the impression—"

*So, now I have a nickname* thinks Maria, putting a hand out, "No, we don't have a roundel, we have a mascot. I'm not thrilled with this shit but the troops dig it so I'm stuck with it."

"Like that flag of yours—"

Maria cuts her off, "Banner! And, it's specific to our ship the Phoenix-Marauder and not the organization as a whole."

Victoria nods, "Long ago our Union-Jack unraveled then reunited soon afterwards. Symbology counts for a lot."

"That banner...it's a little militaristic don'cha think?"

"It's definitely you."

"Ya, then I just want to get this out of the way up front." Maria then flips Victoria the bird, "Kewl beans?"

"Hu, a simple fuck you?"

Maria's hand starts shaking wildly, "No, it's a grand maul fuck you!" Her hands drop to her hips and she leans forward for emphasis,

"You make it back an' I'll take it back. Deal?"

Victoria laughs, "Yes, love, I'll be happy to give it back."

Maria grits her teeth, "'Kay, *poco puta*, don' die! Feel me?"

Victoria nods with a smile, "Loud and clear."

It's 12:06 and they still have over two minutes left before the mission was to launch, jump and drop smack-dab over the pastoral Mari Lug region of Nufa at 12:15. With Victoria and Maria bumping shoulders, which is the closest thing you have to a hug in a fighting suit, Maria gets an alert from the tactical download.

With wide-eyed surprise, Maria shouts as she broadcasts to the team, "Oh, shit! We gotta jump now!"

As Maria and Victoria break and race for their gunships, Opie asks Oshiro as they stop shooting and hurry up the ramp of their ship, "Yoshi, you know who that was?" With Oshiro nodding yes he asks, "Tell me you got all that!"

Oshiro smiles back, "Queueing it up!"

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