

64

all your base are belong to us

LCTN: ELECTRA-4 (Pleiades cluster)  
CORD: SAO-76131.07 (134pc from SOL)  
TIME: 11:45zulu (local 10:01mst)

When Jacob dropped in on the SCC base on the north end of Scab, way back in 2295, the only thing up here was the Co-op's base. After their little altercation the BDF was booted out and our old friends in Security Services took over the operation. Since then a small city of ten-thousand, called New Darwin, has sprouted up just a stone's throw from the base.

The thing is, New Darwin has a strange symbiotic relationship with this base. Obviously it was built to serve the base and to defund the SS personnel of their wages and bonus money all for enjoying said services, but this city is so posh that it has become a hot vacation spot and tourist trap for many coming to Electra and the SS doesn't mind whoring their little city to the public. In fact, the top restaurants, night clubs and escort services in the Pleiades will be found on the Church Key as well as in New Darwin.

Nobody knows who the investors were, or who owns it all now for that matter, but if Boxter Hartcourt is looking for something to do after he tires of politics then it's a sure bet that he'd rather come run it hands on instead of through proxies.

The original purpose of the Co-op base was to dominate the Pleiades, that is when the time came, but with Security Services here anymore it's simply a clever vehicle to readily channel their people on holiday into New Darwin. That being said, the official purpose of this base is to stage their own revolving RRF team.

Security Services, having been on the receiving end of Jacob Graves' Rapid Reaction teams more times than they can count, have modeled their operation exactly after his. In fact, since Sapphire itself is a neutral zone, the SS has been leasing out the old SA gunnery range and proving ground on Black Stump, a massive volcanic island

at the tail end of Scab, for two weeks out of every month.

The Annex hasn't used it in 3 decades so why not?

See, back during the previous war old Security Services was referred to as the Mercenary Club but over the last twenty-three years they've been taking new hires mostly from the BDF and this is for three reasons. First off they have weeded out the sociopaths from the not so good old days and second, they've been luring the best and the brightest away from the CDF and third, for purely budgetary reasons, this eliminates the need for basic training and mitigates most advanced training to 'while on the clock.' With bonuses in mind the SS rank and file is squarely on the cost consciousness train—not exactly pinching pennies per se, but definitely on the lookout for efficiencies.

Now, the Annex leasing out their old gunnery range is one thing but, truth be known, in the night clubs in New Darwin and the Church Key where the SS and SA mingle, because they do, the SA operatives who've been studying the SS training on Black Stump have been secretly critiquing their efforts under the table. Yes, Maria has actively encouraged this and, yes, the SA analysts are mostly pointing out obvious deficiencies, but it has helped spawn an air of respect and comradery between these combatants instead of the animosity one would expect.

So, on to current events...

The SS-RRF team stationed here has never launched for a real combat mission simply because over the last few years they had no reason to—the SS has been winning this fight. They'd like to think like the CDF brass, believing the SA is on the ropes, but the SS knows that the Annex has been giving up territory a little too easily. Then the published casualties and losses by the SA do not jive with the SS tally sheets but, hey, their bonus numbers definitely synch up.

A big time winner in the BDF troopers jumping ship for the SS effort is good-old Porter Macquarie. Here in Security Services he was accepted into pilot training and he has made quite a killing shooting down SA fighters and droids—ending up as one of their top aces. Unfortunately all good things must come to an end and today he is now a Major at the New Darwin base commanding one of the rotating RRF battalions, and by sheer-stupid coincidence he's commanding the battalion currently on active-station for today.

When Major Macquarie got the mission orders directly from Boxter Hartcourt he was, as he says, gobsmaked with a brick, and when he sends out the alert for them to 'saddle up' his team load and launch in record time. In the twenty minutes it takes for them to race down the thirteen-hundred kilometer coast of Scab to the Church Key, Macquarie relays to his troops their orders and mission details.

Orders and a mission that did not surprise his people one bit.

01001111-0110010-01100100-01100101-0110010-00110110-00110110

Maroochy Dan, Major General of the CDF, is striking to look at and when anyone sees her for the first time, not knowing who she is, they'll think—in a heartbeat! Then when they see her in uniform and find out who she really is they will make themselves scarce and fast. Dan is a mix of Aboriginal, Scandinavian and Scottish blood with a dash of Maori that, when whipped up, gives her a sinewy-athletic build, unique ethnic features, dark coffee-n-cream skin with a shock of dirty blond hair that looks totally out of place. Then when you take the time to think about it none of this should work, but for her it really does.

She has been coined the 'Black Swan' and that is not from her history and colorful reputation, command style or anything more than that's what the name, Maroochy, translates to in Yuggera Aborigine so, like her looks, this handle really works wonders for her too.

While in uniform she never smiles, and though her curt and humorless façade may convey the abrupt air of a Berlin dominatrix, her reputation and combat antics are clearly a mixed style reminiscent to the British SAS with a touch of Rhodesian ZiPRA guerilla. Bold, unconventional and notably brutal the 'this girl doesn't play' rep was almost shattered when DFM Cyzk, an SA commander she has studied and admires, managed to slip through their fingers today. On the post battle debrief on the way to Sapphire she had to suppress her laughter and applause with a scowl fitting to her station.

A lowly CIC technician tried in vain to warn command about longitude and latitude orientation on Taiji but he was brushed off by his superiors as an annoying little gnat—which confirms two things. One is that command needs to de-stratify themselves and really listen to their people because, just maybe, they're right. Two is that their intelligence source has been compromised because obvious subterfuge is obvious. Their mole in the SA should have noted the orientation of Taiji and for obvious reasons.

Her report to senior command will address these issues and more with her patented flame-thrower of a tongue.

Dan's superior and corps commander, and all round political knob-gobbler, Lieutenant General, Lionel Bristol, has to rely on people like her and yet fails to listen to people like her. He climbed the ranks by playing the game instead of doing the job at hand and today is a prime example of him not being able to do that job. In her mind this guy couldn't run a dock crew, let alone command an army, and yes they took Taiji but Cyzk got away just the same.

Another thing that pisses Dan off to no end, on top of her division being held in reserve during the Taiji operation, is that it took them an hour to jump and drop into New Sydney. If they would have been training their people, instead of channeling everything they had into the Polaris-B "fondue pot" then they could have cut that down to thirty or maybe even twenty-five minutes.

Descending onto the Church Key they find out that Security Services out of New Darwin is already sitting on the deck outside the Spike and the Kilosphere. With eighty of their Djinn fighters orbiting the site, in command of the air, sixteen of their Javalina drop ships are spaced in a cluttered array allowing for only one of his ships to land just outside the spike. Rubbing his hands in glee, Bristol orders his squadron of Condor fighters to orbit at a hundred kilometers and the regiment sized assault team to set down eight kilometers northeast on the civil airfield while he lands among the Security Services ships.

With a battalion of SS troops in ACE fighting suits surrounding the Spike and their Djinn fighters buzzing around the place at high speed, Bristol thinks this mission is in the bag, but in Dan's mind this set up has red flags written all over it.

Its 11:45zulu and the second his Javalina drop ship touches down his command company races out and file into two close order parade formations facing the Security Services troops who are scattered lazily about the grounds. From between the formations Bristol and Dan step through, followed by the company commander, a Major, four platoon leaders and their division Sergeant Major in tow.

In Bristol's mind the Security Services troops scattered before him and lounging about are undisciplined sods with zero respect for authority, but in Dan's mind these people are perfectly at ease in perfectly placed positions to provide a perfectly murderous cross-fire and it's obvious. Where Bristol's arrogance and incompetence blinds him to what's before him, the little signals-man in Dan's head is waving that red flag like a bloody hopping maniac.

Bristol stops in front of a handful of SS troops whose backs are towards him, and frustrated that the troops who see him have not jumped to attention he nods to the Sergeant Major who shouts out, "Lieutenant-General Bristol is on the deck. Atten-hut!"

Macquarie turns with a purposefully surprised look, and while giving a single index-finger salute his sing-song Irish accent mocks him, "Well now, Lieutenant General, sir! Top of the morning to ye!"

Bristol is shocked that this soldier did not wait for him to return the salute, so he snorts through his nose and, "Major—"

"Macquarie, sir!"

Bristol is on the edge of fuming, "Major, I'd like to speak to your Lieutenant Colonel. Can you bring him forward."

"Love to sir, but because of budgetary cuts we don't have a Lieutenant Colonel for you to chat up. In fact we've done away with superfluous ranks like Second Lieutenant and Lieutenant General! Beggin' your pardon, Lieutenant General, no mean for disrespect, sir."

While Bristol's nostrils flair out, bristling at the contemptuous insubordination, Dan sends an SCC neuronet text to her assault forces putting down at the civil airstrips telling them to not disembark and to button up—and to leave if they lose contact with her.

Bristol has only dealt with a handful of attaché from Security Services but never the lowly grunts, and since this is a PMC instead of blowing up he offers, "I want to thank you for securing the site for us, but your services will not be needed going forward."

"We have orders to stand fast, sir."

"And I'm ordering you to stand aside, Major."

Macquarie smiles, "Well now...we have ourselves a stand off!"

"Major, I have orders from the office of the Chancellor to take the Church Key as soon as Taiji was secured."

"Do tell, and what else will they have you do?"

"We are to arrest Marshal Ramirez and all the members of the Steel Annex we find so, will you be so kind as to step aside."

"Love to, General, but we won't be doing that today..."

"Why you insolent Paddy-bastard!"

"You see, General, we also have orders from the Chancellor's office, and ours are for us to prevent you from fulfilling your orders. Also, our orders came from the Chancellor only a half-an hour ago so, on that note, have a nice shove off, General, sir!"

Dan can only shake her head ever so slightly as Bristol gestures for the Second Lieutenant at the end to, "Lieutenant Warsaw, step forward and disarm this soldier."

Bristol is pointing towards a Sergeant two meters to the right of Macquarie, and before he moves, Macquarie puts a hand up to the young man, "I wouldn't be doing that, my little butterbar!" He looks at Bristol and sweeps that hand between them, "General, imagine this, an imaginary line between us. Anyone who steps across it and, well, we will shoot 'em. Consider it fair warning, Sir."

Bristol, staring into the eyes of Macquarie, says with a slight snarl, "You have your orders, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant takes five steps forward and stops in front of the soldier, and as he starts to bark a command, Macquarie, without breaking eye contact with Bristol, whips out a pistol from a cross-draw holster and snap fires a 10mm breezeblock round into the temple of the Lieutenant who crumples to the ground dead. As that shot rings out all of Security Services raise their weapons and ready themselves to mow Bristol's people down—all the while dozens of five-story tall SA turret defense towers silently rise up from behind hidden portals in the ground, all over the peninsula, and target everything in sight.

Without blinking Macquarie says to Bristol, "Poor bastard, but I suspect you be goin' through second lieutenants like jars of Vegemite which I find surprising 'cause that squidge taste like arse."

This whole time, Vossler has been approaching them from the Kilosphere with two flat boxes in hand, and as he comes up from behind Macquarie he opens the top one and holds them out between him and Bristol saying, "Care for a donut, anybody?"

"Morning Chief!" Then with a surprised look Macquarie pulls a twist from the box, "Yank cakes! Don't mind if I do!" He then asks with a smile and a wink, "Love the towers, Chief! I guess you got yur ghosty-bots on line as well no doubt?"

Vossler nods, "They're all lit up."

"Don't be shootin' us now!"

"Then I would suggest you guys duck!" Vossler, noticing that Jacob's Thunderbolt has dropped in and is circling the Spike in close formation with the Djinn, looking to put down, closes the donut box and says to them, "Marshal Ramirez will see you two now. You can each bring three of your people and follow me."

01000001-01100111-01111100-01111100-01010000-01100010

Almost two kilometers up near the top of the Spike, in the lobby of the Steel Annex, Lieutenant General Bristol is standing next to Major Macquarie, and where Macquarie made practical choices, bringing with him two of his sergeants and a corporal, Bristol has dragged along Dan, the Major and the Sergeant Major—leaving not one experienced commander with the company.

In Dan's mind they deserve to get whacked now.

Vossler, after offering a donut to the receptionist, steps through the door into 'the office' while the receptionist asks them all while nosing away, "Gentlemen, lady, anyone up for coffee?"

Bristol gives a subtle shake of the head, no.

Macquarie, however, puts a finger up, "Thank you, love! We'll take four of 'em, black." He then looks to Bristol and, "How 'bout you General. Wanna get in on this?" Bristol turns his head towards him with a look of hatred, so Macquarie then glances at Dan with a smile, "How 'bout you Dan? It's been a long time, sweetheart!"

Dan actually likes Macquarie, but she has to put up a front by growling under her breath, "I should have shot you twenty years ago."

"Yea, but you didn't, love! And here we are!"

As a CIC tech brings out the cups of coffee for the four from Security Services, in the far end of the elevator lobby a door silently slides open and out steps Jacob and Cyzk with their weapons held up and ready. While they quietly approach, the receptionist motions for the two to lower their weapons.

The SS Corporal in the back goes, "Ay, Major, we got a couple of camp followers on our six."

Macquarie turns and grins big, "Well now, Marshals Graves and Cyzk! No doubt a fine morning!" Nodding towards Cyzk he goes, "Cyz' I have to say you did a fine job at Taiji, a real ripsnorter of a get away! You deserve a hand, but we'd spill our coffee."

Suddenly, Maria steps in through a side door, "Good morning everybody! Actually, it's zulu afternoon now. Anyway, you caught me at a bad time and my hands are busy fricken' full..." Stopping by the receptionists desk she looks at Macquarie, "Hey, Porter!"

"Great to see ya again, Mar!"

Maria then asks Bristol, "What can I do ya for, General?"

Bristol huffs slightly then, "Marshal Ramirez, let's be civil about this. It's over with, the Steel Annex has lost. I've been ordered by the Chancellor to take control of the Church Key and place you and your people under arrest."

"Really..." Maria bobs her head introspectively, "And what is it that we lost? That kinda went, whoosh, right over my head."

"Madame, you lost the Pleiades. Your forces are scattered. There is no sane reason to continue this charade."

"Again, General, I'm not quite sure what we lost exactly?"

Macquarie adds, "Yes, General, I myself am kinda lost as to what Marshal Ramirez has lost? Can you elaborate, sir?"

Bristol gives Macquarie a looks with daggers, then turns back to Maria with a smirk, "Since a professional decorum is lacking around here let me put it in a way you'll understand."

Maria bats her eyes, "I'm like bubblin' with anticipation!"

"All your base are belong to us." Bristol shrugs with a smile, "I always wanted to say that as a kid and here I get to say it for real. Funny how things turn out, isn't it?"

Maria gives a long-comedic look and, "Oooo-kay, and that's your mouth sayin' what your ass don't have!" She then taps her lips with her a finger and, "Ya know, buck'o, there was something I always wanted to say too! Let's share the love, wanna hear it?"

Bristol shakes his head, "I am all ears."

Maria points to him with a grin...

000001000000