

68

cannon break

LCTN: ELECTRA-4 (Pleiades cluster)  
CORD: SAO-76131.07 (134pc from SOL)  
DATE: 2318ce-NOVEMBER-21-THURSDAY  
TIME: 10:05zulu (local 09:33mst)

Jacob pops into relative space high over Sapphire, and dashes down to one-hundred and sixty kilometers altitude before dropping out of the MDDSH spacial displacement field. It pops like a soap bubble leaving him with a forward velocity of just under supersonic, which is no big deal, but he exits the dash without wings or rudders attached to his fighter which is kind of a big deal.

They had already been ripped off long before he jumped.

He instantly switches on the anti-gravity drive, because it's the easy option, and when he does he feels a bump and hears an electrical 'zit' from behind the cockpit. This is followed by an alert that the AG drive has just dropped off and the left MDDSH nacelle is also now down for the count. In the tacnet, projected in his visual cortex, he gets dished up a delightful little image showing the path a 7.62x54 bolt where it entered the fuselage from behind, then ricocheted against the top-port razor engine, followed by it puncturing the AG drive unit. Turning on the AG killed both it and the port MDDSH node.

Jacob says to himself, "Houston, we have a problem."

Bud comes across his headset, ["Well, this ain't good."]

"No shit, a triple failure."

"I can't say you ripping your wings off going after those two IR5 was a failure per se. That was intentional."

"I got 'em didn't I?"

["I'm already dead so for me it was a hell of a ride."]

"It was a hell of a ride!" Jacob laughs, then switches coms and asks, "Trixie, you got any ideas?"

The ship's imbedded computer AI, named Beatrix, responds, ["Yes, ejecting would be in order."]

"No fucking way! You've been flying with me now for twelve years! I am not gonna let you go, Trix!"

You can almost hear Beatrix pursing her lips, ["Let me put it to you in terms you will understand, copy me over to your PBDi and punch the fuck out!"]

Bud laughs, ["What she said!"]

Jacob argues, "Trix, I'm sorry I ripped your wings off to bag those two Kali, but I did it and I still managed to get us outta there!"

Beatrix agrees, ["Yes, but I got a tail full of Long-Legs for that stunt. Look, my recommendation now is to eject."]

"I can get you on the deck."

Bud protests, ["Will you listen to her?"]

Jacob shakes his head, "I got pitch, I got roll, I got this."

The aerodynamics of the Thunderbolt airframe produces a considerable volume of lift without said wings and rudders, and the elevator and ventral fins both provide pitch and a significant amount of roll if needed, it's just that Jacob has to maintain a high enough velocity to keep it all in the air. Beatrix flashes up three potential flight paths into the Church Key and Jacob picks the first option.

Jacob says, "Bud, alert civil CK-Control that this is a mayday. We'll be coming in below the common flight paths and drop in on the main six-klick runway. Maybe fifteen minutes or so? Trix, at subsonic, what do I gotta do to maintain level flight on the approach?"

Beatrix says, ["Keep it over eight-hundred kph at a three to five degree pitch. You'll have to play with it coming in. To land, reverse vector full power for three seconds and you'll cut forward velocity by half. Any more than that and without the wings we'll drop like a rock and crush the gear."]

Bud speaks up, ["Dude, the breaks will not hold."]

Beatrix confirms, ["They'll strip out at over two-fifty kph."]

Jacob comes back with, "I know. We'll cannon break."

Bud and Beatrix both go, ["Cannon break?"]

"Yea, cannon breaking! We'll fire the twenty-three at full power and empty the drum-magazine."

Bud laughs, ["You'll burn the gun out, d'uh!"]

"Trixie, we've torture tested the guns like this, right?"

Beatrix informs them, ["At twenty percent power, what we usually set the twenty-three-three for, we can fire for two whole seconds. Cool for thirty and fire again. At full power we are limited to a quarter-second burst because if you fire for more than a half-second the gun will seize up if you try to fire it again."]

Jacob asks, "But if we don't let up we can empty it, right?"

["Correct, every test proved those results. Doing so will burn the gun out and it will not be recoverable."]

Bud goes, ["Wait, what? You're fucken' nuts!"]

Here's the deal, for close air support (CAS) pretty much all fighters carry a cannon called the 23 that fires the 23mm rocket assisted micro-nuke bombs with a 1,000 kg yield. The most common is a single barrel weapon called simply enough the 23. Some guns are a two-barreled reciprocating bolt in a 'Gast gun' configuration called the 23-2. On the other hand, the Steel Annex came up with a gnarly three-barreled rotary gun design for their Razorback variants and the Thunderbolt designated the 23-3. Nobody ever uses the 23-2 or 23-3 designation and refer to all of these weapons as simply the 23. Now, the Razorbacks and the Cerberus uses the 23 like fricken crazy, but the Thunderbolt rarely, if ever, finds itself in a CAS role. Jacob has never had the opportunity to fire the 23 on a mission until now.

Beatrix adds, ["Bud, the twenty-three with a reciprocating bolt or rotary chamber will seize while firing where the twenty-three-three will go right on firing as long as we do not let up. All stress tests of this weapon system confirms this finding."]

Jacob also adds, "Paleo did this in a simulator and it worked."

Bud thinks about it and, ["Man, I still say eject."]

Beatrix throws out, ["Fire time for the twenty-three-three, to empty the drum, is approximately sixteen point two seconds."]

With the Church Key coming into sight, Jacob steepens the decent and says, "Bud, you're on radios. Trix, defeat the gun settings and config weapon trajectory for maximum range."

["Field Marshal, at a maximum ballistic profile the rounds will reach thirteen kilometers altitude and drop down range from sixty-six to sixty-eight kilometers. That depends on the tail wind which is about twenty kph. Detonation will be two-hundred meters altitude."]

"Perfect!"

Bud informs them, ["FYI, C-Three says to eject."]

Jacob snorts, "Yea, right."

Bud laughs, ["That's exactly what I told 'em!"]

"Thank you!"

["Doesn't take a mind reader."]

At thirty-five kilometers distance Jacob calls out, "Feet dry."

They are now flying over the peninsula towards the civil airstrip, north of the pyramid complex, and coming in at four hundred meters altitude they are descending rather slowly.

It takes only two and a half minutes to cover that distance, and as they approach the end of the runway, only fifty meters up, Jacob says, "Trixie, if the gear collapses and we skid then that's okay, but if you are about to roll—only then do you eject me. Got that?"

Beatrix says, ["Got it."]

Now over the runway Jacob concentrates, "Let's stick this!"

He pitches the nose level and punches the reverse-vector of the razor engines to full power for a count of three. Reverse vectoring has this weird push me-pull you effect where the intake suction-thrust fights against the rearward-thrust being channeled above and below, and opposite the direction of travel. This still manages to cut their speed down to just below 440 kph. The ship is now dropping fast so Jacob pitches the nose back up to 12° and this creates a huge pocket of lift above the Thunderbolt and dramatically slows that decent. While deploying the landing gear the covering hatches rip off, but the gear holds firm as they make contact with the runway.

He touches down and rotates better than perfect, but the problem now is that they are coasting at over 400 kph—and not slowing down one bit. When they cover half the distance of the runway he switches trigger control to the 23 and fires.

The muzzle is by the cockpit, at the root of the starboard nacelle opposite the other gun called the 88, and where the 88 sounds like a shrieking rip the 23 is like a jackhammer going off. The weapon fires over seventy of the 23mm rocket assisted bombs per second. The bombs arc slightly up as they streak away while the ventral fins sweep left to compensate for the cannons off-center torque. At 16.25 seconds all of the 1,160 rounds in the drum are gone, yet the force from this weapon has not only stopped all forward momentum but has pushed the ship backwards—now rolling at a brisk 5 kph in reverse.

With a plume of heat rising up from the muzzle, warping the air on the right side of the cockpit, Jacob takes a deep breath and, "Okay...I think that'll do."

He pushes the drive management control forward and the thrust from his razor engines pushes his Thunderbolt forward. Jacob taxis off the runway and pulls onto the ramp that is a straight shot to

the Spike all the while Bud radios to CK Control that they're clear and that they should check for debris on the runway. He then informs the C3 they are taxiing in their direction. It takes less than three minutes to reach the Spike, and with them approaching the grassy knoll near the entrance there is already a crowd forming.

As the ship stops at the knoll, Bill Nguyen and Kevin Vossler are already taking a quick walk around it. Surveying the damage they just shake their heads as they count the crush fractures on the canopy as well as dozens more on the fuselage and left elevator. They also count only one actual entry hole in the back, which must have been the culprit that took out the AG drive.

Jacob opens his canopy and as it tilts forward the distant explosions from the 1,160 bombs finally reaches the Spike. Like a muffled rolling thunder, everyone looks towards the west but they cannot see the explosions that happened three minutes and forty seconds ago down range.

Hopping out, Jacob floats down to Bill and Vossler and pops his suits canopy while Bill gives a low whistle, "You are the talk of the town! When we heard you were gonna land this heap we had to come down and see for ourselves, and you did not disappoint!"

Vossler agrees, "Mighty-mighty fine flying, FM."

Jacob asks, "How long to make her airworthy, Bill?"

Bill shakes his head, "Nope! What we got here is a total."

"Come on, man! Can't we sneak some parts in or somethin'?"

"No can do, buckaroo! All the forty-seven lines are down for retooling, and nobody is going to give one up—even for you! And before you ask if we can slip wings out of the seventy-four lines that will not happen for a bis-E conversion. It's a total."

While shaking his head, Vossler smirks, "Should have thought of that before you went after that Kali."

Bill goes, "Two Kali."

"Two? Nice!"

Jacob nods and asks, "So...whaddya got for me?"

Bill smiles, "Seventy-Fours, only..." He gestures towards the cavernous hanger under the Spike, "In this gaping maw here, in the bowels of God's Own Punji, I got thirty-two Seventy-Fours primed for bear. The sixteen on the right—they're mine. The sixteen on the left has had not one flight hour or portion thereof with a human butt-cheek in the seat! Go pick yours and just give me the tail number."

Jacob huffs, "WEP is He rated, right?"

"Just like the Cinderblocks will be, but if they sit idle then it's cryo-nitrogen. If you got an hour we can re-tank it!"

"Naw, cryo-N is good enough."

Bill nods, "Just so you know in this universe, the Forty-Seven has always been the fastest off the line...until the Seventy-Four."

"Ya, it beats it in the quarter but the T-Bolt always takes it in the stretch...every time." Jacob starts for the dark hanger while he thumbs towards his junk heap of a fighter, "Park Beatrix underground and nobody touches her! My ship here is a legend, got that?"

"Righty'o! Nobody touches her, I guar'ontee!" As Jacob steps into the dark underground hanger, Bill calls out to him, "Remember, on the T-Bird everything is exactly the same...just different!"

With the suits canopy still in his hand, Jacob stops just past the underground opening and waits for his eyes to adjust. After about a half a minute, two lines of fighters come into clear focus.

Where Beatrix manages his Thunderbolt, the CHiP AI from his personal PBDi unit works his JACC, and where Beatrix is exceedingly nice and friendly Jacob's CHiP, whose avatar is based on the fictional animated science fiction character Asajj Ventress, is crass and direct, <"All of 'em look like cookie cutter what the fuck, if you ask me.">

Jacob laughs at that, "Yea, Asajj, my sentiments exactly."

<"They look so damned fragile.">

"Made of the finest Ural-grade Stalinium."

<"Remains to be seen, so...which to choose?"> She then erupts in a curious excitement, <"Hey! Look at the tail numbers.">

Jacob reads the first one as 31409 and the second one as 31423, so he snorts, "I think I'm thinking what you're thinking!"

<"If it's here then that's the one!">

They walk down the line of fighters and the second to the last airframe they find 31415, so Jacob smiles, "Well, I'll be damned!"

<"Yea, baby! Let me tie into it for ya!"> Within seconds she links into the ship and fires it up, <"Power up initiated. Trixie and Bud are uploading now. Three minutes, a reboot and she's yours!">

Jacob stares at it and wonders how small it looks.

Called the Thunderbird, the ASF74 uses exactly the same air surfaces of the ASF47 Thunderbolt as well as the same landing gear and weapons systems. Only problem is with a 40% reduction in mass and cross section of the fuselage also means a 25% cut in missile load out but only a 10% reduction for the 8.80mm ammo drum. This nip

and tuck job to the 47 was to gain greater maneuverability—all to take on the Djinn in an honest turn fight. Then again, the Djinn can't skid for shit so, in Jacob's mind, what's the point exactly?

Jacob starts laughing, "That cockpit looks so little!"

<"You always go for the tight holes!"> His CHiP snarks. She then displays the skin options and says what they are as they flash up, <"So here we got matte-black, glossy, camo green, pixelated gray, desert tan, sky blue and, your all-time favorite, tiger-stripe PK!">

Jacob just shakes his head as the ships skin rolls over to pink with light tiger stripes, "I hate that combo."

<"Yea, but it works.">

"Thanks, Asajj. I'll take matte for now."

With it changing she says, <"Hop on in and I'll sign off.">

Jacob floats up and slips into the cockpit. Sitting in the couch he takes a long minute to look around—realizing that everything is small and cramped. It's the same as the Cerberus cockpit, copied over from the IR5, which is even smaller than the Gryphon cockpits.

Scooching down, he clamps in as the canopy lowers over him.

Beatrix speaks up, ["As you would say, love the digs. Flight parameters are uploading and compiling. We can taxi out and launch in thirty seconds. Remember, the main gear have the powered wheels like the bis-E blocks. Sixteen kph max."]

Bud wakes up, ["Well-well-well, what have we here!"]

Jacob thumps his shoulder into the canopy, and then the other side while shaking his head, "Damn! Tight as a fist."

Bud laughs, ["You can kiss Saturn goodbye in this thing."]

Jacob activates the wheels for taxi, "Ain't no wiggle room."

Silently, they roll out and turn towards the hanger entrance, and halfway to it a familiar silhouette appears in the light.

Beatrix announces, ["We are now ready for powered flight."]

Slowing to a crawl, Jacob huffs, "Or maybe not?"

With the silhouette of Maria raising her arms and crossing them above her head, Jacob brings the ship to a stop five meters short of her, so Bud goes, "Let's see what she wants?"

As the canopy opens and Jacob unbuckles he says to Bud, "How about you go talk to her."

["Nega-tory, you got this!"]

"Coward." Says Jacob as he hops out of the ship and steps up to Maria while taking the full helmet off his JACC, and as he opens his mouth to say *hi* she puts a finger up to her mouth with an audible *shush* indicating to him that he needs to shut up.

"I got an alert from Taiji, before you jumped, and I pathed your file!" Maria takes one step towards Jacob and, "I thought I would come down and say, hi! Then before I could get my ass in gear I hear you performed this aMAziNg landing! I mean it's one for the books but, on the way down it all started to worry me just a tad..."

Jacob opens his mouth to apologize but Maria puts two fingers up to his lips and, "Shush-shush-shush! See, that shushing sound I'm making, means for you to keep your gob-awful yap shut. Feel me?" She takes a long breath and, "Thinking we need to have a chat about this, and to save time, how 'bout I talk for you too!"

While using her hand like a puppet, mimicking *Jacob*, Maria goes back and forth while speaking for both of them, "*Sorry 'bout making you worry, hon.*" — "That's okay! How's Peña?" — "*He's fine, not a scratch.*" — "And after catching a blue shell up the ass that's good to hear! Now, Trix switching off the governors so you could go after those two IR5 on the deck was pretty ballsy." — "*Kinda scary if you ask me.*" — "Yea, ripping your wings off at over Mach five-three would make my butt pucker too!" — "*But I did splash those two bastards didn't I!*" — "YES, yes you did! Got yourself a double ace on one sortie now did ya!" — "*Plus one!*" — "Plus one..." Maria is about to blow her top when she says, "Let's count together, shall we—"

Glados, suited up in a JACC, has been approaching Maria from behind and says to them, "So, I got your orders. We're leaving early?"

Without breaking her predatory gaze into Jacob's eyes, Maria first whispers to him, "You lucked out..." She then responds to Glados without pulling that gaze, "I talked to Scott, the drop on Ngāti Whā has been cancelled for today. We're gonna switch targets and pallet drop those bots on Nufa and probably GTA5 next Wednesday."

Glados nods, "Primus Hyadum! That'll freak 'em out."

Maria turns her gaze to Glados and asks with a happy voice, "Hi! Just wondering, are you two...still an item?"

Curiously, Glados goes, "Yea?"

Maria nods big, "Good! Glad to hear, tight bonds..." She then points to the fighter, "You're air combat rated now so, how many hours you got so far?"

"A hundred and twenty-eight in the ZoMug, thirty-two in the Thumper and, to date, I have eighty-three in the HoMug."



Maria's face scrunches up slightly, "HoMug?"

"H-M-M-G, for Holy Mary Mother of God."

Maria laughs, "That was quick!"

"Yes, it was. Word is nobody can tell them apart until they get right on top of 'em, and by then it's too late."

"So, you're comfortable flyin' this, the HoMug."

"Like everything else, easy to pick up but a bitch to master."

Maria smiles at Glados, "Okay, you're driving..." She then points at Jacob, snarling, "Don' you be sayin' a fuckin' word, *pandejo!*" Maria again shifts gears and smiles at Glados, "My orders are for you to take him to One-Klick, and Mac will pick you up in an hour! Now, go hang at Monique's, have a few drinks, a few laughs, fuck your brains out and I'll see you tomorrow at eleven hundred hours Pacific time. And if you haven't guessed it by now, chuckle-fucker here is off the clock for the next four days. Not a call, not a text, not a peep!" Again she snarls at Jacob, "An' that means shit outta touch, mutherfucker!" Maria bodily turns to him, hopping mad with balled fists, "When I told you, you could get back into the shit didn't mean for you to MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME!" She shouts, then asks, "Feel me?"

Glados chimes in with, "I'm right there with ya!"

Maria looks at Glados with a cruel deadpan, "Saddle up."

With Glados slinking off towards the fighter, Maria gets in Jacob's face, "If it wasn't for Diego's quinceañera tomorrow I'd be stomping your shit about now!" She starts to laugh and can't suppress it, "I'm so angry! Get outta here before I lose my cool!"

As Maria turns away she shouts, "Glados, that's One-Klick, one jump, not one deviation or I'll disappear his ass!"

With Maria stomping out of the hanger, Glados slips up beside Jacob with a wicked little smile, "I say you got off pretty easy."

Jacob just puts his hands out, not saying anything.

Amused, Glados asks, "Coming?"