

108

stukas over disneyland

LCTN: 54-TAURUS-A5 (Hyades cluster)
CORD: SAO-98368.0104 (49pc from SOL)
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The two remaining anti-air Mechs are in a mad scramble to get away from Command-One and Two who are trying to chase them down here in Toon Town. It is almost comical how they're racing back and forth between huge blocks of stacked conex containers because, if you didn't know any better, you'd swear these machines are in a panic. They're not, but with the short-choppy strides they are taking in the light gravity of Scorch, all to prevent hang-time while bouncing up into the air, makes it look like these robotic monsters are having a good old-fashioned tail-between-their-legs freak out.

Tomorrow during the press briefing on Taiji, General Giáp will show a video of them in the container yard in hot pursuit while these robots are executing their escape and evasion protocol, along with Yackety Sax playing in the background, and everyone will have a great laugh with it but, right now, things are deadly serious.

Giáp goes, "Put the micro up its arse, corporal!"

With the general pulling his weapon back from the corner, the squad's corporal swings his BR1 around that corner and, spotting via the optics, fires a Micropede after a mech that is racing away.

"Shit!" The corporal pulls back as bolts start to shred the edge of the conex container they were using for cover. With pieces of metal being ripped from the box, he says to Giáp, "On the way, sir!"

With the firing having abruptly stopped, the general pulls his weapon around the tattered box and, seeing the monster take a corner into a crossing lane two blocks down, and the missile that was fired miss the thing and destroy empty containers down range, he grins big, "Slippery bugger!" He then dives around the corner, "Follow me!"

The entire squad is right behind the general as they pour onto

the main transfer lane between the blocks of containers, and while fast approaching the first crossing juncture, just forty-meters short of it they get the jump scare of their lives when the Rockwell-Yaskawa mech sprints through the gap between the blocks.

The machine is already gone as everyone in Command-One scrambles to either hug the ground or slam into the nearest container looking for some cover so, noticing some of Command-Two members leaping over between the blocks of containers, Giáp points up and to his right, calling out, "Let's go up an' cut tha' bastard off!"

In the light gravity the team members, including the general, look like parkour masters as they leap up on top of the blocks of containers that are in stacks that range between two and six boxes high. As they bounce and leap from one row of boxes to the next, the rest of Command-Two is leaping and bounding along towards them.

Giáp points to his left while shouting to the other team leader over the din of battle, "Your bloody Rockwell went that'a way!"

Team-Two's Major laughs, "Tah for the vector, Zip!"

As Command-Two run and leap past, "All in good fun, mate!"

With that team clear, Giáp goes on channel with his people, "Fire Team Three, go forward to clear the cross-lane two blocks down! Team Two, head out to the main juncture three rows out. Team One and I will be heading right to clear the main transfer lane."

After two minutes of them leaping from one container to the next, with the vertical stacks troublesome to navigate, all the while watching for any sign of the machine to pop up, Giáp approaches the main transfer lane and glances over—then leaps back.

A string of Co-op long legs, the 7.62x54mm bolts from the Ryazan's miniguns, slash through the steel box like lasers and shred the edges of it, ripping pieces off that tumble violently through the air. With this, the general spins around a full 360 when a bolt punches through his left hand right as he took his leap.

While flying back, and without aiming, the general snap fires the grenade launcher on his BR1-k and drops two of the wonton bombs into the lane. The freight boxes shake with the force of an earthquake as one goes off behind the machine that pushes it forward where the other bomb goes off on its armored mantel and knocks it over to the ground. Having been thrown two containers over, Giáp is already on his feet, and watching as the mech's miniguns shred the top edges of the conex boxes between the blocks.

Fire Team Two reaches the general, where the Sergeant asks him, "How we be doing, Zipper?"

Giáp tosses a Micropede missile to the sergeant and says, "Would you do us the honor, Magz!"

You didn't have to ask the sergeant twice, "Me pleasure, Sir!"

"There's a good lad!"

The sergeant slaps the missile into the launch tube and, with a running start, he leaps across the transfer lane and snap fires the missile one handed towards the back of the mech.

As both miniguns swing around to shoot him in midair, the missile hits dead center, splitting its armored mantel in two and this violently smashes the robot into the ground. Giáp and the corporal both fire a grenade into the lane just to make sure it stays down.

The general notices Thunderbird fighters orbiting the park, so he opens the coms with Rand, "What's the status, Pogo?"

Rand comes on the channel, ["If you kindly's are done pramin' about, I could use the help on FAC about now!"]

"What's the status on the b-mods?"

["We've got Stukas over Disneyland, if you be askin'!"]

He nods with approval and, noticing a large mushroom cloud rising up between rows of containers a half kilometer away, Giáp asks, "Command-Two, you put tha' Rockwell down, right?"

The Major radios back, ["Aye, not much left of 'im!"]

"Okay, go FAC for Pogo, we're off to meet the ninety-eight!"

01000100-01010111-01011001-01000011-01001011

The reports from the intel community indicated that Jessica's HWG101b should be an easy kill all because the only thing she has ever done to it over the last four years was to baby the thing. They have gone after her on three separate occasions, while she was flying her Thunderbird, and that was a huge mistake when she easily handed their asses back to them by shooting down eight combat tested pilots. Today was supposed to be payback for the humiliation but, as it is, she just shot just down eighteen Djinn and three Enfield.

And it took Jessica only twelve minutes!

The 101b was believed to be thin skinned when compared to the 101a models, and supposedly easier to destroy, but the damned thing just took six hits by Co-op mini-missiles with a micronuke warhead equivalency of 500 or 1,000 kilograms of explosive force. Yet, here it is still in the air and kicking up water less than 100 meters over the surface of the Omaio sea.

With the three Hydrapede droids surrounding her, Jessica has dropped below Mach 2.5 to allow them to keep up while maneuvering. With her pulling the babyback into a tight loop below the six 20/20 cluster bombs she cut loose two minutes before, she is hoping that the BDF pilots don't see them since they are suspended motionless in the air by their AG steering mechanism. Sure, that happens to be a dirty trick, but it's a dirty trick that works wonders...when it works.

Kagame's 16 Thunderbirds are dropping in from space, and 20 of the enemy Djinn and Enfields are climbing to meet them, and 8 of their fighters split off and are diving for Jessica, with 7 of their Centipede missiles in the lead, and 14 of their Hornets trailing behind them, Jacob comes on channel to ask, ["How ya doin', Scarab?"]

"I'd be doing a lot better if I had Straight Razors!"

["What, you don't have the Straight Razors?"]

"I wouldn't still be here if I had 'em!"

["It's only a software update!"]

"What? Are you fucking me!"

Jacob snorts, ["My Trixi is sending your Trixi the code now."]

After a few seconds, Jessica's instance of Trixi announces, ["Jessie, I have it in queue, but it will require an engine restart."]

"Now is not a good time for this shit!"

Trixi adds, ["If you find the time then call it out. It will take from fifteen to twenty seconds to kill and restart all the engines."]

With Jacob and his wingman racing towards Maui from Rongo, Jacob says with icy calm, ["We're coming for ya, sweetheart."]

"I'll be here!" Jessica then turns the ship towards the coast of Kai Pai and pushes the thrust to maximum while switching over to ship coms, "Angela, I got the Eighty-Eight, you got the micros and the stingers." With Angela acknowledging, Jessica looks up at Samantha and smiles big, "Remember your training, Samael?"

Samantha looks at her and, "What...training?"

"On the Twenty-Three! The reticle will be in lead."

Samantha is startled by this, "Are you shitting me, Red?"

"We need ya on the stinger! Angela is overclocked but she can't do it all. You gotta step up." Jessica drops the ship lower to the ocean, "Just like in the sims, but what was fun there is real here. Cinch your straps up tight, and don't be sprayin' like a nube."

Samantha nods, "Conserve my shots, right?"

“That’s my girl!” Jessica kicks on WEP and squeezes more speed while saying, “Take ‘em down!”

Angela starts by shooting all of the Centipedes down, which was easy, but with the mini-missiles Samantha works on blasting them out of the sky. After she nails half of them the rest start to drop off when their motors sputter out. Now struggling to exceed Mach 5, the Enfields decide to launch four Centipede-Azul missiles after her.

“Fuck that.” Jessica snarls as she cuts power and pulls the ship about in an impossibly tight Immelmann turn. She pulls the ship up and over—and coming out of her roll she is now flying towards the oncoming missiles and fighters.

The Azuls are exceeding Mach 6 when they drop their first stage motors, but they hold off on firing stage two all to see where the Babyback was going to go. Jessica continues to climb to meet them head on where the missiles fire stage two to close the distance—where she then drops the nose and jinks the ship in a severe negative-G maneuver where they totally bypass the missiles. Noticing that the fighters flew over the suspended 20/20 bombs instead of below them, she pulls her nose back up and pushes for a head on.

Samantha asks, “What are you doin’?”

Jessica grits her teeth, “I want you to fire the Twenty-Three on them as they shoot past. Lead ahead of the reticle, got that?”

“Just like in the sim!”

The BDF fighters can’t turn away fast enough to get away, and at five kilometers Angela starts pickling off a dozen Micropedes on the approach as Jessica opens up with the Eighty-Eight rotary-cannon in the nose of the Babyback. The bolts rake over two Djinn—ripping their wings off in the process, and as they shoot past the six remaining fighters, one Micropede hits an Enfield. Samantha was tracking two fighters that were banking away so, having selected a simple elliptical spread for the reticle, she gives it a three degree lead at the edge of the targeted lead and opens up with a one second burst.

Four of the seventy 23mm rocket assisted bombs she fires connect with an Enfield and a Djinn, and as the ships are tumbling apart Samantha gives a cheer, “Woohoo!”

Jessica calls out to Trixie, “Restart now!”

She has the AG up to maximum pull forward, all to keep them from slowing down too much but, as luck would have it, when the engines drop thrust the gravity-repulsive engine drops off too.

Like someone hitting the breaks, the ship is slowing down so much everybody is being pulled against the straps of their seats in a

two-gravity deceleration.

Jessica grunts, "What the hell happened to AG?"

Trixie mentally shrugs, "Part of the update?"

Noticing that the Babyback is slowing down and losing altitude the BDF pilots don't turn about—but extend. Now thinking this may be a trick they want more distance between them.

Seeing this, Jessica huffs big, "You gotta be shitting me!"

01011001-01001011-01001011

With General Giáp's ground forces finishing up the 'fun part' of today's mission, that is blowing up the primary targets and nobody getting killed for the effort, it is time for their Forward Air Controllers to step up. Normally as a FAC you are carrying the world on your shoulders while relying on others to do their job reliably. Now, where an FO has the same responsibility as a FAC they are faced with far fewer points of failure. As a FAC you are at the mercy of everyone's (so many everyone's) potential fuck ups that in the past it's a wonder that anyone would want to do the job.

This all has to do with Close Air Support, and one little stupid oversight means the wrong people may die.

With the SCC-neuronet and the SA-tacnet, with real time data and targeting being shared by everybody, a friendly-fire *faux pas* is a rare thing anymore. The four industrial parks, with all targets marked within designated attack corridors, and CAS flights assigned to specific FAC teams, today's *coup de grâce* will be easy peasy.

With Rand having let the Controllers off their leashes, she has taken personal control of the Warthogs, "Righty'o, Puff, Zero-One-One! You are clear for the first string from Nav-P. Bring it in!"

The first Warthog turns to run in from the Navigation Point, ["We copy! Magic Dragon zipper-line is on one-fiver-three!"]

Because of the Cerberus, the only time Warthogs get in close anymore is landing forces on an air assault, otherwise it functions as a gunship from a stand-off range. Today they go back to their roots all to wipe out a twelve-square kilometer container yard. Now, in the old configuration they had three particle/plasma guns, but today they are working with two different configurations. One is the "Kiel's Hog" config sporting two particle guns and a single Pazuzu gun under the nose. The second is the "Wonder Warthog" config with three of the Pazuzu guns and no particle beam weapons.

The cool thing about the Razorback is its flexibility in adding

Pods where the need arises, like that Missile Farm they usually carry but avoid using. For today's mission they've been given a pod right out of the Frankenstein school of cobbling shit together.

The SKA pod, for Stupidly over-Kill Adaptation, has a Pazuzu gun on top, but below they have one of the 30mm seven-barreled railguns pulled from F308 Bulldog fighters out of Palmdale. Instead of using the last 180 Bulldogs as throw-aways, they've been pulling these apart for their parts. The 30mm cannons from those Bulldogs have been refurbished and are now in turrets below on the underside of the SKA pods—and with twelve thousand of the 30mm rocket assisted bombs, with a two-thousand KEG warhead that is jokingly called the "Disney-Swish" by the crews, the irony is not lost on anybody.

General Giáp is standing in the doorway of a hangar at an aircraft production facility located by what used to be the airfield outside of Toon Town. Here he is watching the SA Warthogs lazily drift over the yard at 200kph with the 30mm cannon puking out hell-fire in a wide angle pattern on the conex boxes below.

From this vantage point he hears the explosions made by the warheads of the 30mm rounds—followed by the rip from the gun when they were fired. Flying over the destruction, the ships also perform a MiDAR scan for damage assessment.

One of the maintenance crews have already pulled and staged the tooling for the F51e. The Annex was able to reverse engineer the Djinn without much trouble, but the Enfield was a bit of a challenge. Permanently borrowing the forms and tooling makes copying the thing so much easier.

With two sets of the tooling being pulled into the massive hold of the larger HWG98, Giáp has blood dripping from his bandaged hand as he asks the ship's crew chief, "How long will this take, Staffy?"

The Staff Sergeant goes, "Ten-twelve minutes. Fifteen max."

The general shrugs, "I like eight minutes, meself."

The Sergeant laughs, "Well, sir, I would do a quick tie down just to get off the ground, but I was told to be careful with it."

"Aye, do what you need to, son."

01110000-01101000-00110011-00110100-01110010-01001101-01000101

Jacob and his wingman pop in over Kai Pai at just under 150 kilometers, rotate towards the surface of Maui far below, and push their MDDSH engines for just a blip of a second. This accelerates their Thunderbird fighters up to Mach-stupid before they drop the spacial

displacement fields. Thirty times the speed of sound isn't bad in the thin atmosphere, but pushing into progressively thicker air on decent is problematic because they have to apply their AG-dive in a constant three-G deceleration to slow down so they don't rip their wings off.

But by doing this they'll get to the deck in half the time!

Kagame's squadron is keeping the twenty BDF fighters, a mix of Djinn and Enfield, sent up to meet them busy. She has lost one fighter, but so far they've lost three Djinn who were trying to pull her people into a full blown dogfight where, at slower speeds, they stand a better chance to maneuver for a kill. As it is, both sides are in huge defensive loops looking to see which side was gonna to take the now suicidal shot at an attack but, as things go, this gets broken up before it cascades into a chaotic shooting spree.

Jacob and his wingman trainee, Jace Verdugo, both dump a full canister of twelve Micropede missiles as they blast through this Lufbery square dance. All of the BDF fighters scatter because "oh shit" applies to everyone when it comes to these itty bitty missiles at close range. Jacob and Verdugo both score a kill on separate Enfields just seconds after they shoot through the formation at 12,000 meters, and this mad scramble of evasive twisting and turning gives Kagame the chance to chase them all away with little effort.

Jacob and Verdugo continue to decelerate while diving but, instead of pulling towards the three fighters that extended earlier, from the last attack on Jessica, three of her Hydrapede missiles are keeping them busy so they turn their attention towards two flights of Djinn that are hedgehopping at low altitude trying to sneak up on his daughter from the west—who is still in a decent without power.

"Fuck me!" Grunts Jessica.

Now that her ship has dropped so low in altitude, the Hornets are trying to split-s early so as not to overshoot their target. With a new convergence point fast approaching, all twenty-four of the now Straight Razor engines suddenly gasp and spring to life.

Jessica pulls the Babyback into a vertical climb, and there is so much power available to her that a shit-eating grin starts to spread across her face, "Yea, baby! We're in business!"

With the scorpion guns hammering away at the fourteen Hornets that are closing in, from each missile that is hit out pops three of their mini-missiles. Faced with this new mess, Jessica rolls her ship to place her armored topside of the fuselage towards them—where one lucky mini-missile manages to hit her in the port side above the nose where the Eighty-Eight is mounted.

That's not a good place to be hit with a 1k-KEG warhead, but

what now gets her attention on the tacnet are the two flights of Djinn that are streaking in from the west at low altitude, so Jessica snarls, "These fuck-wits are not gonna let up!"

Jessica barrel rolls then aileron rolls out of that while pushing the engines to full thrust towards the east. With her inching past Mach-6 the seven surviving Hornets fall behind at Mach-3. Suddenly her sense of relief is short lived when three more flights of mixed Enfields and Djinn pop on the net from the east.

Jessica can see her father on the tacnet, fast approaching a thousand meters, so she radios, "Where are you?"

Jacob and Verdugo's ships are shuddering violently as they continue to slow down to a useful Mach-3, and while pulling their noses up towards the flights coming in from the west, he radios to her, ["Come back around and follow me out, hon!"]

"Yea, okay!" Jessica cuts power and, again with the AG drive breaking to slow things down even more, and when she drops just below Mach-3 she yanks the stick back making her ass skid through another overcooked Immelmann turn—where she then rolls out of that while pouring on all the coal, "I'm a-comin', pop!"

With her jinking the Babyback around the seven Hornets, Jacob asks, ["I see you took a hit in the nose?"]

Jessica huffs, "Yea, just one."

Jacob laughs while saying, ["You know you're supposed to take it in the Tramp Stamp, duh!"]

Jessica also laughs, "Fuck off, already!"

Jacob and Verdugo are now low, with Jessica screaming in fast behind them, so Jacob says, ["We'll scatter AFU to the west and you can get the fuck outta here. My wingman will escort you home."]

"No, you keep 'im! I got the power I need now."

["Nope! Kagame is overhead, so just deal, okay?"]

Jessica shakes her head while saying, "Asshole."

["That's my girl!"]

Because Jacob and Verdugo are approaching low and fast the Djinn in the two flights are forced to break and climb away early, so to keep them running they both fire a Centipede-Mew after them.

With them scattering, two of their numbers fall out of the sky by the Mew. Jessica zeros in on a straggler and lets him have it with the Eighty-Eight as she charges in. The rain of 8.80mm explosive bolts shreds its port wing, canard and MDDSH nacelle. As the thing spirals

out of the sky the pilot ejects, but instead of flying clear in the decent the pilot is temporarily caught up in her ships wake, which spins the pilot around like a top as she streaks past.

Also passing through this melee, Samantha opens up with the Stinger gun and nails a Djinn with a 23mm bomb.

While Jacob turns to square off with the four remaining Djinn, Verdugo is hot on Jessica's tail as she climbs almost vertically for space at high Mach speed—where she announces, "We are outty!"

Reaching 145 kilometers altitude, they both kick in MDDSH and zip off together in an Echo-Three zig-zag to a quiet place they can spool for a jump. After three minutes of charging, the Thunderbird nestles up to the underside of the Babyback, and when the charge is set Jessica jumps them both directly to Sapphire.

01000001-01010011-00110010

What Bob had wanted most since joining the Steel Annex was to become a fighter pilot. Early in his career he was spread too thin to be accepted into flight school, but the rejection notice he received back in 2273 is kind of a moot point now that he's dead.

His journey ended on Fjalar just a scant four and a half years ago and Stone Garden has been a lot of fun, sure, but three years on it dawned on him that he could get back in the game regardless of what he was before he died. He signed on to retreat but instead of a stripe and a couple of rockers, he got all six of 'em.

Not exactly what he wanted, but beggars can't be choosers.

Bob went through normal flight school, just like everyone else does, but for air combat training he received executive level treatment when they shuffled him off to Paleo. The problem Paleo had was that Bob was an excellent student and couldn't keep holding him back when he proved to be better than competent.

So he was handed off to Peña!

The one fighter dedicated to host ghosts is the F308m. Called the Mako, this thing is a full spectrum fighter but it's been relegated to CAS as a matter of design. Yea, it has been assigned oodles of escort missions, and some recon jobs, but truth be told all of the Mako pilots would prefer a good old-school fuck about overhead on CAP.

So, here's Bob, a newly minted Mako pilot rolling into his third cannon run on his first combat sortie, zipping along a 152-southwest vector and coming in low from the designated Navigation Point for this sector. Normally they hand off a new Nav-P for each run but nobody is

shooting back today.

The run he just made was better than perfect, and the single 30mm round punched through the wall of a plant at the second story level. The 0.01 second delay allowed it to reach the center of the structure—where the blast puffs the exterior walls out like a bag of popcorn in a microwave oven before the explosion blew the walls out. The cool thing about the Cerberus, and most CAS missions today, using the 23, 30 and the new 37mm railguns, is that you can actually witness your own handiwork before you overfly the target!

Yea, sure, Bob would rather be flying CAP, but watching as the thing you just shot at pop like a fiery balloon does make you want to grin like a 'tard in spite of professional decorum.

As Bob pulls out of the sector and merges back into traffic, on the CAS loop, Peña comes on the RRF channel with, ["Everyone, we're being asked to pull the bulk of our CAP and throw it at Maui. As it is, you CAS guys will be finished in about ten minutes, so when you're done you'll CAP for Quantus when they bring the five Guppies out. Bam-Bam will take over for me. We clear?"]

With hundreds of clicks on channel, Peña switches over to the command freq, ["Kincaid, you're in charge. Can do?"]

Chet Kincaid replies, ["Will do!"]

With Peña rattling off orders for the main body of CAP pilots to rendezvous before approaching Maui, and with all eight-hundred of them starting to climb for space, Bob asks Peña, "Who do you want me to pair up with, Oscar?"

Peña is laughing as he pulls his b-mod up beside Bob's Mako, ["You're not stayin' here, Jackson. You're comin' with!"]

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