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accademia all'assassina

LCTN: ELECTRA-4 (Pleiades cluster)
CORD: SAO-76131.07 (134pc from SOL)
DATE: 2323ce-APRIL-21-SATURDAY
TIME: 22:12zulu (local 25:20mst)

Back in 2275, Jacob, Cricket and Maria were sent in different directions with the hope they could be salvaged after the events out at Saiph-6B. In an attempt to keep things quiet they were code named after the three wise monkeys, that being *Kikazaru*, *Mizaru* and *Iwazaru* (*id est*, hear, see and speak no evil) so that if anything got out about them then it would be hard to link it back to the three.

It got out and everybody knew it was them.

The rank-and-file viewed these three monkeys more as tragic figures rather than heroic. Jacob wouldn't listen to his handlers and yet he survived because he didn't subscribe to their training. Cricket couldn't cope with the visions of death Jacob left in his wake when she went to collect their fallen. Maria, for the first time, wouldn't say shit if she had a mouthful, fact is she was rendered speechless by these events, but if you were to say anything off-color about Jacob or Cricket now she would claw your face from your skull. With that said, no one was surprised when she ultimately nailed the bastard who ambushed Jacob then wiped out their platoon days later.

Saiph-6B bound the three in a way no one could comprehend.

So, to review, each training cycle from Cue Ball goes on to deploy as an operational company for at least half-a-year before being broken up, that is if they are to be broken up, and keeping with tradition, fifty-years after Cue Ball they are all scrounged up wherever and sent to the Church Key for a *lil' fēste*.

Here tonight in the western banquet room on floor 210 of the Spike, we have five of "the split six" who were shuffled off to Bob's old company attached to the Marauder—where the balance of the training cycle was sent to the Sawney Beane. Over the years, the six kept in

touch but this is the very first time they have seen anybody from their old training company since 2274 and, as expected, everyone, except four of them, have been retreads for quite some time now.

Most training companies have one or maybe two who rise to company or battalion command, but rarely above that. Here we have five who made it to Deputy Field Marshal or better...

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Jacob, Maria and Cricket have kissed their spouses, Michelle, Sasha and Bill, and where these three are now trailing behind the attendees heading for the elevators to leave—two of those people are approaching the head table, while Jacob throws out, "Hey, Yu!"

A Cambodian male, with a heavy Bostonian accent tosses it back at him with, "That's Phoc Yu ta you!"

Maria smiles and asks, "Phoc who?"

Phoc offers a hand to her, "Phoc Yu, at your service!"

Cricket just shakes her head, "That ever get old?"

Jacob and Phoc both look at her, "no."

After the palm slap and fist bump, Maria also looks at Cricket and chuckles, "Old? Yea, it does, kinda, but its tradition."

"That so, eh?" Phoc points to them, "What we got 'ere are a couple of stiff-necked, Brookline douche poodles!"

Cricket rolls her eyes, "Fifty years and I still, to this day, haven't got a clue what that shit means?"

The other guy, Lennard 'Leeroy' Jenkins, better known in intel circles as Blackjack 1108, who could pass as Scott's older brother, is laughing big as he bumps into Phoc while saying, "You never let up!" He knuckle-taps Maria and Jacob, then turns towards Léon as he walks in with their doggie bags, "Hey, Lay-on, that was some killer chowders! What the hell you call it, again?"

Léon shrugs, "*Pasta all'assassina?*"

With him blinking in confusion, Maria goes, "Killer pasta!"

Jenkins nods, "Yea, it was, but what—"

"It means killer pasta, quite literally."

Léon adds, "From the *Bari academia all'assassina.*"

Maria throws out, "With a Church Key twist!"

Jacob goes, "You could teach them a thing or two!"

"*Oui!*" He hands Maria a bag with, "The yabby featured a citrus reduction..." Then to Jenkins and Jacob each a bag while saying, "The loin of bumble was charred with a suet based cacao mole."

Cricket adds, "Most of the time us peeps get DuPont chicken at these events. Tonight I saw a chef get a standing ovation!"

Léon hands one to Phoc then Cricket, "It was a team effort." He gives Maria a peck on the cheek, and as he turns to leave he says, "These are double servings in the bags! Enjoy your meeting, *ciao!*"

As Léon steps out, Phoc asks Maria, "This is your stepdad?"

"*Oui!*" She then turns to Cricket as she is preparing to leave, "You ain't goin' nowhere, Crick."

She wonders, "I thought this meeting is about Rho Tau?"

Maria nods, "Yes, but now you're in the need-to-know loop."

Phoc rubs his eyes, "Let's make this quick. I'm on zulu time."

"First off, Duck, I want to thank you for taking charge and getting Hippo-Six up to operational speed!"

"Yea, fine, so now I go back to the Iron Man, right?"

"It's the O'Malley, and...no. Current command has a rhythmic groove goin' and Scott's not gonna crowbar ya back in. Sorry dude!" With Phoc snarling at the news, Maria adds, "So, after Pee Towel you'll be looking for work, but we're not going to retread ya."

"What'll it be then?"

"Hippo-Seven."

"That's CXi."

"Titus-CnC will always be SA."

"Regardless of who's driving, how 'bout ya fuck off?"

"Doubly-sorry FM, you're now a GM!"

With Jenkins trying not to laugh, he asks, "What about me?"

Cricket perks up, "You're in Planning, dude, why is that?"

"After Polaris I got branded as Spooky."

"All the Simon pilots are Spooky!"

Maria points out, "The CDF was lookin' to knock 'im off."

Jenkins smiles, "And here I am! So, what about it, Mar?"

She looks at him and exhales big, "Hippo-Eight."

His face scrunches in pain, "Oh fuck."

"Civ-X needs to navigate! It's either you or Kati but—"

"Orc is a silverback!"

"That may be, but with Kati I'll need to move her up to DFM for a half a year before I can put her over a station. Scott doesn't have a slot open for that so you're movin' on up, Group Marshal!"

Jacob adds, "You won't be bored!"

Jenkins asks, "Who got Hippos three, four and five?"

Maria nods, "Yea, we've been keepin' tight lipped about that. It'll be Yoon, Stark and Sargent."

"An old school crew!"

"And when the new yo-yos stand up we add Phoc an' you!"

Phoc asks, "Why me?"

Maria goes, "You know combat drops better than anybody?"

"The CXi is a civilian op."

Jacob points out, "True, but the service divisions don't know shit, so you're gonna teach 'em. Bring them up to our standards!"

Phoc realizes, "So, *that's* my side job."

Maria throws out, "Speaking of which, where we at with Rho?"

"You read the report. We're at fifteen seconds."

Maria nods, "That's pretty tight."

"A leading edge drop is nuckin futs, but I made it fast-n-safe."

Jacob speaks up, "That ya did, but we wanna make it edgier."

Phoc shrugs and says, "Your dump over Arda is already in the worse possible conditions possible! You asked for that, an' you have to jump inside a ninety-second window to pull it off."

"July second, at seven-thirty-seven zulu."

Phoc squints, "What do ya mean, edgier?"

"We added two regiments. Mook and Raven." Phoc gestures for more, so Jacob elaborates, "Aaaas...Jumping JACCs."

Phoc shakes his head and, "For twenty, what-eight years? People have been waiting to see us do that again and...now? Mordor?"

"Fourteen...Urchen Gnome, remember?" As Phoc nods big, Jacob adds, "I just sent you the updated profile and the string of code we want you to append to the transitional-shift script. We also need to adjust the angle of attack towards the northern tropic."

"That'll be Udún. Up front, this'll triple the loiter time."

Jacob then throws out, "Since JACCs can't accelerate for shit in microgravity, to spice things up we want the equivalent of a Mach-5 approach towards the tropic on the dump. It's in the string."

Phoc starts to laugh while adding, "Dude, you...you do realize they'll be hitting the upper atmosphere before they can get clear?"

"Perform a gravity-pull, yank the deck out from under 'em."

Maria asks, "Waddya think, a-Duck, all that doable?"

Phoc ponders this then says, "If we can do the pull I can get it down to maybe...twenty, twenty-two seconds?" He looks at Jacob and asks, "You sim'd the shit out of this, didn't you?"

Jacob nods and, "Best I could get was twenty-six seconds."

Maria goes, "Ya gotta find a way of shaving five or six off."

Phoc gives her that look, "That's a double-blind d'uh!"

Jacob adds, "Problem I had was that I don't know what the station g-limits would be, nor what you can get on the reverse flow?"

Phoc nods, "On a side note, it's gonna take...four, maybe five weeks to survey the ships and I'll need a half day to batten down the important shit before we jump for real, but still we're—"

Jenkins snorts, "You're gonna break some dishes, dude!"

"Ya think?" Phoc looks to Jacob, "Can I see your sim?"

Jacob nods towards him, "It's in the profile."

"Can I go over it with ya tomorrow?"

"I'll be here all day waiting to hear from you!"

"Let's meet for lunch, I'll need you for the afternoon."

"That's why I'll be here!"

"Doesn't the ninety-six have a mission tomorrow?"

"It's a side op. They don't need me for it."

"Your DFM is Venk, right?"

"Yup!"

Phoc snorts, "Your right, they don't need ya!"

This whole time Cricket has set up five shot glasses and filled them with Rye, so with her handing them out, "Here, guys."

As they gather round for a toast, Maria goes, "How 'bout all ya'll come to my place for that lunch. I'll spring for the rib-eyes!"

Jenkins volunteers loudly, "I'll be grillin' 'um!"

Phoc asks, "Legend has it she fucked up your dinner party?"

"After Polaris, when I got pulled back into Planning, yea."

Jacob laughs, "She had to flip the menu on the fly by chopping those burnt-ass steaks into—an exquisite carne asada!"

Maria adds, "Léon heard about it and, when I showed him what I did, this is how he does it for *olá* now."

Phoc smiles at Jenkins, "Maybe you should let 'er fuck it up?"

Jenkins shakes his head, "Naw, she owes me a steak-steak!"

Cricket says, "Guys, let's wrap this up so I can go see my little one!" They all raise their shot glasses with Cricket, who says, "Here's to Chang, and I do know the Chief is fucken' an' killin' it!"

They knock back their shots, where Maria coughs and asks Jacob, "You know who Chinky teamed up with, don'chya?"

Jacob nods, yes, so Cricket asks, "Who?"

Jacob says, "Burke."

"No shit!" Cricket then worries, "You're okay with that?"

"Yea, they're both aloof assholes. It's a good fit!"

Maria announces, "Eleven, my place in the City. We can run the sim together—open the floor while knockin' back some brewskies!"

Phoc ponders and goes, "Ya know, for all the stations I figure I can get a three-g pull and reverse flow by the grav-pods. Maybe a two ta two-point-five range between the axial core and the periphery, however, the CA-rings will end up a mess."

"What kind of mess?"

"A three-g mess." Phoc nods, "Spring it on the sci-dweebs at the last minute it's gonna take weeks for 'em to clean up."

Maria thinks about it, "Most I can give the yo-yos is maybe a five-hour heads-up. Let's pick this up tomorrow. See you guys then!"

She motions for Jacob to hang back as the rest of them make their goodbyes and step out.

Now out of earshot, Jacob asks, "What'll it be, not my boss?"

Maria smiles at that, "Where's Guns a-go-goin'?"

"Fifty-Four Tau. The Commission is directing the cleanup."

"How'r you and Shell getting along?"

"On top of being gorgeous, she actually likes me! Can't figure that out?" He shakes his head, "I don't deserve her."

Maria's face scrunches up a tad, "She's bat-shit crazy-nuts 'bout you! You're gonna fuck it all up with that shit perspective."

Jacob nods, "Five-by-five, but that's not on your mind."

"Babs reached out and was askin' about you?"

Jacob's shoulders sag, "Shit."

"Weren't you gonna cut that off?"

"Was, but Shell wanted to meet her—where I find out that she has an affinity for red-heads."

"Shit git weird?"

"You could say that."

"Was it fun?"

"Yeeeee, kinda?"

"What about Shest?"

"When I'm not around. It keeps her occupied!" Jacob points at Maria, saying, "An' I ain't gonna open that door!"

"Michelle will, so you might as well git-r-done!" Maria grins with, "My Fifty-Two, Nickel, she told me the collective had a side pot on who was going to jump you. Looks like Shest stands to win!"

Jacob sighs, "I don't want it, but my gut says Shelly does—"

"If you were smart you'd get it behind you."

With Jacob shaking his head and rolling his eyes, bowing to the inevitable, "I'm not gonna push back."

Maria nods, then asks, "You're staying at Red's old house?"

"Yea, after the RRF I gave up my exec-flat here to Peña."

She points down, "Doesn't Jessie have a room for ya?"

"With Scott and Nancy now on three-sixty-three, she opened his old room up for me, but I don't want to be a bother."

"Well, sixty-six is free for ya!" Maria pokes him in the chest, "If you're gonna see her why don'cha take my penthouse tonight? It's only in use when Mofid is in town so...have at it!"

"I really don't want to be a bother."

"Twisting your arm is a bother!"

"You're okay with this?"

"Less lag, babe!" She then smiles, "An' don't worry if you spoooge all over my sheets, I'll be having the place fumigated after you leave so...whatever goes!"

Jacob starts laughing, "Fuckin' assbat!"

"Would you have me any other way?"

She smiles as he gives her a friendly kiss, and as he steps off, Maria points out, "Ya know, Diego was right. We had to get a divorce, and a decade between us for you an' I to get along."

Jacob turns with wide-eyes, "Don't forget you switchin' jobs!"

She nods while huffing a laugh, "You'd be right about that!"

Jacob wonders, "Where you gettin' it now? Zam's bony?"

Maria shrugs, "When Sash or Vic are not around."

"Is 'e any good?"

Maria blinks introspectively, "It'll do!"

Jacob smiles and turns away with, "Good to hear!"

Maria takes a deep breath as she watches Jacob make his way for the elevators. A thousand emotions race through her mind, but the one thought that overrides them all is the joy she feels because they get along so well nowadays. She has always secretly wished things were different between them but now, today, she wouldn't have it any other way—where the moment is interrupted by a beep in her ears and a tacnet audio link-icon bouncing in her field of view...

Maria opens it and, "*Que pasa, Roja?*"

Jessica asks, ["Waddya doin'?"]

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