

LCTN: 51-TAURUS-A2B (Hyades cluster)
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Stumbling onto potentially habitable worlds orbiting gas giants happens to be a common theme in human exploration, but finding one where we don't have to do anything to the place before we break ground and set up shop has been the rare exception—and Maui tops that really short exception list.

Tū, short for Tūmatauenga, is the primary star of the 51-Tau star system. The fifth of twelve planets, Taranga, is a gas giant about the size of Neptune and in Maori tradition is the mother of Maui, the largest moon in orbit around her. There are thirty moons orbiting this planet, notably Hina and Tuna who share a common barycenter on an orbital track about a million kilometers out.

Then we have Tāne, the secondary B-star in the 51-Taurus system, which is an orange dwarf that is host to eight planets. It's second planet in orbit, Rongo, is an agricultural export powerhouse that's very much like Maui in that they didn't have to do anything to the atmosphere for people to move in like they did.

The manufacturing and storage arrangement between both Maui and Rongo are kindred spirits to the Zemlya Dva and Scorch relationship out at 54-Taurus. The difference being is that when GTB6, that being Zemlya Dva, got hit on the same day Javan got stomped out at Polaris, the Co-op mothballed the storage and distribution operations here on Rongo. Components and product are now shipped directly from Maui, so when the Annex showed up over Rongo, fifteen minutes ago, the BDF knew in their gut that it was diversionary.

Maui must be the real target, but when will that happen?

Anyway, the CDF would have sent half of their air assets, totaling eight-hundred fighters consisting of a mix of the Djinn and a smattering of the new Enfield, but the BDF is in control of air defenses

on Maui and they overrode what the CDF General ordered.

The Major General in command of operations at 51-Tau is hopping mad, yea, but inside a quarter of an hour the Brigadier in command of the air defenses will be proven right.

In the hold of the ship, Jessica and Samantha scramble to strip down to mount their JACC fighting suits, but when Jessica looks up she realizes that Stiller and his family are all strapping themselves into the rearward facing seats.

With only her t-shirt on she steps around the along bulkhead and orders them to, "No, forward facing! Move to the forward facing seats because we are going to be maneuvering!"

Stiller realizes why and, "She's right, everybody move over!"

"Set your seats at a thirty degree recline!" Jessica then looks at the oldest, the fifteen-year-old boy, so she points to the forward facing workstation across from the cockpit, "You, get in there!"

With Stiller and his wife strapping the thirteen and ten year olds in before seating themselves, Jessica whips off her shirt as the young man races over to the workstation, and being so young he has a hard time not repeatedly glancing at her naked body as he struggles with the five point harness of the seat.

With him belting in, Jessica touches the workstation screen and it comes to life, "You can watch what's happening on this. The trackball directs the view. Have fun with it!"

Not enough time to stow themselves in the forward bay, the six ghost droids pile into the cabin and strap themselves in the rearward facing seats as Jessica turns towards Stiller, "It's gonna be a bumpy ride, Vince, so show 'em where we keep the barf bags!"

Samantha has already mounted her suit, and as she inserts her head into the helmet Jessica hops into hers, feet first, and with her arms pointing down the suit rises up and encapsulates her body.

Samantha is slipping into the WSO seat as Jessica grabs her own helmet assembly and calls out, "Hold on, everyone!"

Right as Jessica opens the hatch to the pilot's station, she hears Stiller laugh, saying, "Hey Nicole!" This is followed by a familiar voice in response, "It's be awhile, Vince!"

She blinks and looks around the along bulkhead...

As a courtesy, ghosts in combat droids project their heads in the helmets visor—and the effect is almost lifelike. Jessica knows that the droid squad leader for her ship is the ghost of Angela Simmons, who is also functioning as her co-pilot, and seeing her sitting across

from Stiller was no surprise, but what was a surprise was strapped in next to Angela, so Jessica blurts out, "Mother?"

Nicole shrugs and says, "Sorry, I just grabbed a slot that said 'recon support' and I didn't think to see if it was you!"

Jessica blinks and, "That's okay, how's Oompa?"

Nicole huffs a laugh, "How 'bout you get to work?"

"Sure!" Jessica turns while saying, "We'll chat later."

As Jessica reaches for the pilot's station, the co-pilot instance of Angela Simmons says to her on the coms, ["Check list complete! We're at zero buoyancy with gear up."]

Having already tied herself into the tacnet interface, Jessica notices that four BDF Djinn fighters are bearing down on them from the east and are about seventy kilometers out, so as she slips into the pilots seat she orders, "Full-pull west! Let's hit it!"

Against a three-G acceleration, via the AG drive in reverse, Jessica braces her foot against the alon barrier between her and Samantha as she struggles to belt in. Snapping the last belt latch, she grabs the controls and launches two Hydrapede missiles known as the Red-Shell. With the fighting droids spreading out, low to the ground in the direction of the four oncoming Djinn, Jessica flat spins the ship around and it wobbles as it now points in their direction of travel.

Jessica then asks for the, "Scorpions!"

With their eight perimeter defense railguns sprouting out from the hull, four on top and four below, Simmons deploys the main stinger gun and says, ["All up! Deploying the stinger!"]

"Good idea!" Jessica, noticing three more distant flights of Djinn, now appearing from the north, west and south, looks up at Samantha through the transparent bulkhead and laughs while saying, "Well, Sammi, this ain't gonna be a boring ride-along!"

Taking stock, Samantha gives Jessica a big toothy grin, "Wouldn't 'ave missed this for the world, love!"

01000100-01000101-01000001-01000100

Things are getting crazy here on Scorch...

With Peña and the RRF teams able to exit MDDSH below the Co-op spider missile's operational floor of 160 kilometers altitude, they immediately head straight down for the surface of the planet at high speed. Finally noticing this, the Djinn fighters that were looking for a way to stop General Giáp's people, suddenly turn away from the

industrial parks and scatter. Spreading out in all directions, they climb to find tactically advantageous positions before they turn in to face the RRF forces dropping in from high altitude.

With no means of protection against the troops from Taiji, and with over half of their numbers already culled from today's order of battle roster, the remaining robotic anti-air mechs slip out from cover that was designed to protect them from overhead attack, and they race out to find street level cover away from Giáp's people.

At its top-end run, about 65 kph, one mech leans into a tight turn around a five-story building. With its legs pumping in this turn, it smashes through a stand of trees as it drifts around the facility onto Main Street USA, by the stadium here on Disney. It accelerates out of the turn and, now fully upright, the machine is making tracks towards the Lego plant just a kilometer down the grassy roadway.

["We'z gots a runner, people!"] Giáp radios on command freq, and as his floater pops out from around the smashed trees and onto Main Street, he laughs, ["Pogo, do ya see 'im? The mech bastard is high tailin' it your way!"]

Looking out over the ledge, Rand goes, "Yea, I see 'im, Zip!"

["Well, drop the bloody thing why don'chya!"]

With the mech approaching fast, Rand notices that one of its miniguns is swinging around for Giáp's floater, so Rand pulls her BR1 up while saying, "Okie dokie, mc-pokie!"

In a quick second and a half, through the viewfinder of the weapon, Rand highlights the turret ring at the waist of the machine, locks onto it and fires. Micropede missiles are fire and forget, so when Rand lets the missile fly she throws herself behind the ledge she was standing on—a split second before the ledge is hosed over by bolts.

The Micropede stabs at the mech, right where Rand targeted it, and the machine splits in two. The top segment with the weapons and sensors rolls over and tumbles through the fireball as the lower segment with legs is thrown back by the force of the blast.

A wonton grenade shot from the floater slams into the now dead mech, and as the explosion shakes the building Rand is standing on, Giáp radios, ["Really great shootin', Pogo!"]

"Thanks, mate! Peña is just a few minutes away, so you need to clear out the last of those mechs!"

["We're on it, sugar!"]

Just then another mech runs out onto Main Street, looking for cover, and popping out between the floater and the wreckage of the

dead mech, Giáp shouts, ["Holy bejeebers, let `im have it!"]

As this machine turns to fire on the floater, the first wonton grenade hits it dead center and punches it back. The second one spins it around in a thirty-ton pirouette. The third and final is a 2k-KEG warhead and this cleaves the thing in two—vertically.

With the blasts reverberating off the buildings, melding into the many-many shockwaves that have been crisscrossing the Disney industrial park this whole time, Rand reports that, "Tacnet says the last three of those things are headin' into Toon Town."

Giáp radio's back, ["Right, we copy!"]

Over the centuries, many lines sourced from classic literature, especially Shakespeare, have been coopted by many peoples and, more often than not, are taken out of context. The *res publica* known as the House of Perth is no exception, but it's been said that the line they pinched from Romeo and Juliet now has actual clarity in context when uttered by the troopers from Taiji.

With the open-bed floater carrying Giáp and the ten guerrillas of Command-One down Main Street, passing the Lego plant on their way towards Toon Town, Giáp conveys to Rand, ["You know, Pogo, as they say...with violent delights come violent ends, and..."]

With a tight smile, Rand chimes in along with him by adding, "And we're having a delightful time of it!"

Giáp adds, ["Aye, we be, MG!"]

Rand shakes her head while scanning the sky, "No, Zipper, `ere I'm just a simple novalUM swabby."

["Q-tipper, my ass!"]

The demolition teams have been working their way towards Main Street, and with the explosions getting closer, Rand shrugs, "Honestly, I'm gonna miss the good times we `ad `ere."

01001000-01001111-0101000-01000001-01010011

Jessica's custom Razorback, the one and only HWG101b in existence, was never given any serious thought when it was delivered to her just under four years ago. Jessica flies her Thunderbird like a twisting-spirographic deamon while in a furball, but with what they call the Babyback she has always driven it as if she were behind the wheel of the family sedan on a leisurely Sunday afternoon.

That's quite a change from when she was piloting the 101a2. Where she regularly pushed the a2 beyond its performance envelope, she has always handled her 101b with kit gloves. Flatter, shorter, and

many tons lighter, everyone knew that the 101b should be faster than the a2 but nobody has seen her put it through its paces. She babies the thing like it's got a glass jaw imbedded somewhere in the fuselage that will reveal itself if she were to crank it over too hard.

Nobody ever asked, but they all wondered why?

Well, three weeks before delivery her father got some stick time with the 101b in the sims, and afterwards he came back with two recommendations that both she and Paleo took to heart...

Paleo had the foresight to add a pair of the bisE ventral fins to the underside of the 101a models, but for the 101b Jacob advised them to add another pair—and he showed him where he wanted them mounted. At first glance this configuration made no sense, but when Paleo actually flew the sim it blew his socks off because it now has the flight characteristics of the bisEa model of the ASF47.

This config of the b-model flies like a fighter, and because of that Jacob made Jessica promise that she'll hold back when flying it for real. She has always pushed it to the ragged edge in the sims, sure, but he insisted that she vow to pull in the reins and fly it "commercial" style in the public eye. Jessica was kinda stumped as to why until Jacob said to her, 'The day will come when you'll need to push it, and you don't want them to know what you're all about.'

Taking that sage advice to heart, today that day has come!

Jessica's ship is still accelerating, passing Mach 2.75, while still on the deck. Shooting past the coastline the 101b is so low it has huge-spiraling vortices that can be seen trailing behind each wingtip as it rips out over the water. The fighters following her at ten-kilometers have dropped to one-thousand meters altitude while trying to catch up.

Speed is life, yes, but at this altitude it happens to be suicide with the Red Shells hugging the ground. Below them with a three klick lead are the two Hydrapede missiles lying in wait. The Djinn can't turn for shit at this speed and these droids know it, and right when the fighters hit one klick out the missiles shoot up underneath them in a steep interception vector.

The droids each fire four Micropedes at the Djinn from a point about 500-meters ahead and 200-meters below their interception point. As the four Djinn scatter, each chased by two Micropedes, their turns and climbs are in slow motion as compared to the agile and vicious little missiles that were launched against them.

Three of the F51d's are instantly blasted from the sky, but the one that dove and flew towards the Micropedes was able to jink around the missiles and got clear of them before they could react. Now hot on Jessica's tail, it fires a Centipede missile after her.

Jessica can't release her own Centipede missiles this low to the water so, seeing him fire one, she rolls her ship around and, with her belly up she launches a Mew which falls behind.

She completes her roll while laughing, "Special delivery!"

Jessica's missile is the Centipede-Mew and this thing is both smart and difficult to anticipate. The Djinn pilot starts to climb out, and when his missile is half way to the Babyback its scorpion guns do their job and blast it from the sky. When hit its six mini-missiles, similar to the SA Micropedes, all launch but soon fall away when their motors sputter out, unable to catch up to the Babyback.

The Djinn has just reached three-kilometers when it rolls over to try again, but behind him is the Centipede-Mew and it launches all nine of its Micropedes as it flies up his exhaust port.

The cockpit didn't have to detach from the now vaporized ship, and with the pilot ejecting from it the Micropedes circle him once. With no perceptible threat close enough for them to be able to reach, they all turn away then self-destruct.

Still close to the ground, Jessica increases altitude enough to launch three more Hydrapede missiles followed by three Mew. The Red Shells race towards the oncoming flights of fighters from the north, west and south, but when they reach two-kilometers distance from the ship, the Centipede-Mews are already passing them while climbing for the most direct interception points with the fighters.

The flight from the west is the closest one so, thinking she can follow the Mew out and fly past the fighters as they scatter, she starts climbing but Jessica is struggling to keep up. At five-thousand meters altitude, she realizes the acceleration of the 101b is not quite there. In the sims she's been flying the thing with the Straight-Razor engines, but here she's lagging behind with the older Safety-Razors.

The Mew is already eight clicks out ahead so she banks hard around to go east, and noticing two more flights of fighters coming in at high altitude from the east, Jessica snarls, "God-damn it!"

As she starts to dive, her Centipede-Mews have reached their targets. The only real defense against the Mew is to shoot it down or run, but to shoot it down you have to get closer than you'd want to. The lead pilots from the three flights show balls of steel as they stare the missiles down while they blast them out of the sky, but the problem now are the Micropedes. Everybody scatters but the Micros nail one Djinn from the north, and a pair from both the east and south.

While racing away and continuing to dive, three of the BDF Centipedes have caught up to her. Again the 8.80mm scorpion guns do their job and blow all three out of the sky, but now she has

eighteen of their mini-missiles closing the distance. The 23mm stinger gun now opens up and, with a rip, it scatters 1k-KEG bombs out and knocks most of the missiles from the sky—save for one.

Their mini-missiles also have the wonton, 1k-KGE warheads, but the older ones are 500-KGE, and it was one of those that was coming at her from below the ship. Jessica rolls the Babyback so that it can hit the thickest armor on the topside, where it connects with the fuselage in the back over the workstations across from the cockpit.

The sound from the warhead going off is like a sledgehammer hitting an anvil beside your skull. With that, and the shockwave they feel through their seats, everyone jumps against the straps but the fifteen year old actually yelps because it went off right over his head.

Jessica looks towards the teen and grimaces while saying, "Just so you know, there's more where that came from!"

01001110-01000011-01010011-01010111-01001001-01000011

Just a scant week ago the Co-op pilots met the Cinderblocks on FCAP over Nufa for the first time and it did not go well for them...

Because of the slingshot MDDSH drive on the Cinderblocks, that being the bisEb model of the Thunderbolt, these things can do the random walk and jink along the lowest orbital tracks with greater authority than anything else that flies. The Cinderblock is so advanced that nobody wanted them anywhere near combat, but the beast is virtually untouchable in this role so, going forward, it has suddenly become the dedicated FCAP fighter for the Annex.

Loaded up with the advanced wormtrac Spiders, the latest high speed Mew2 build of the Centipede, and forty-eight of the brand new Green Hornet missiles, a design they shamelessly ripped off from the Co-op, and improved upon, what used to be as much as a few hundred fighters on FCAP can now be easily handled simply by a squadron or two of the Cinderblocks.

For Peña the ability to shift pilots and resources came at the most opportune time because today his RRF forces would have been spread too thin having to deal with Scorch, Rongo and Maui. As it is, he only needs sixteen of the Cinderblocks covering Scorch all because he already knew that if the troops of the Annex made it to the ground then the CDF command was going to write off the industrial parks on Scorch as a loss.

Giáp and his people running amok and blowing facilities up right out of the chute, like they are now, was a total shock to both General Bristol and his command staff when they were given status in

the middle of a working lunch in the West Banes.

So, as predicted, the cavalry is not being sent...

That said, Peña was himself shocked that the troops from Taiji blew up over four-hundred of their Djinn fighters while they were sitting on the flight line! The mix of Thunderbirds, b-mod Cerberus, bisE Wild Weasels, and a handful of Warthog gunships that he brought along with him, totaling 1,010 ships, are now totally overkill when facing the paltry count of 420 remaining F51d fighters that are, at this very moment, climbing and desperately looking for a way to turn it around and make an attack that would make a difference.

As a commander, planning for a fair fight is poor planning on your part, but what's about to happen here to the BDF pilots is tragic because they are essentially trapped. Peña knows his CAP pilots won't even have to try hard to pull a win out of this one, and since the war is basically winding down the Co-op pilots are tired of taking the brunt of command staff trying to salvage something out of this mess.

That said, Peña thinks these people do not have to die today.

Peña comes onto the IFF and makes a humanitarian offer to the BDF pilots, "This is Oscar Peña of the Steel Annex, commander of the attacking forces dropping in over Scorch. As it stands we now outnumber you by more than two to one, and with our respective loadouts these numbers are not going to work in your favor. I know you are acutely aware that if ground action starts, CDF Command will not send reserves or relief, so, I'm going to make you guys a onetime offer. If you stay then my people are going to shoot every one of you out of the sky and, since we have the Cinderblocks above on FCAP, you already know you're not going to get away. On the other hand, you can just leave and let us finish up! Simply turn away and you can get outta here scot-free. Yes, we'll let you go, but you have only one minute to get the hell outta Dodge. Think fast, *amigos!*"

With the RRF forces now hitting 55,000 meters, spreading out so they can engage with the BDF fighters far below, like a key log it takes twelve seconds for the first flight of Djinn to turn away. By the time they hit the thirty-five second mark, all of the Djinn are actively turning about and climbing for space.

Myra Coulter, in command of the FCAP, comes on channel to ask, ["We're gonna let them go, Dog?"]

"Yes, Grawlix, You're gonna let 'em go."

There is a pause, where Coulter adds, ["Whatever you say, Dog, but I sure hope you don't catch hell for this shit."]

"Fuck 'em." Peña switches to ground freq, "General Giáp."

Rand replies in her normally thick rough-nut outback accent, ["O'wdy, Dog, glad ya'll could make it!"]

"Is the General available?"

["Zipper is kind of busy, mate? 'E's in Toon Town after the last two of their mechs. An early-model Ryazan-Tottori, and the other is one of those bloody Chimney-Sweeps from Rockwell-Yaskawa."]

Peña wonders, "A particle gun Sweeper?"

["Naw, a refit, bristling with rail it be!"]

"You mean to tell me that you guys already killed all of the anti-air mechs save for those two?"

["Aye, it was to save your weasels the trouble."]

Peña snorts a laugh, "No, Pogo, it was because you guys were having a blast going after them."

["You could say that, I bagged me a Ryazan meself, I did!"]

"Okay, when Zipper is done fucking around have him mark on the net where he wants the slicks to land. We're slowing down and will be leveling out in about seven to eight minutes."

["I be posting that and the targeting in two. We'll want to get your Stuka's to work before we tackle the Wart'ogs, aye?"]

"Roger that, Pogo! Thumper is first up."

["With Command-One an' Two faffing 'bout in Toon Town, it'll be my Command-Six who'll be Fucking Off for you here on Disney. All FAC elements go live when targets post on the net. Status on Fanta, Tomo and Advent are as is. No changes there. We copy?"]

"We copy! To confirm, CAS will orbit counterclockwise with incoming attacks running from the northeast to the southwest."

["Aye, for traffic flow let's keep it simple! An' ya'll might as well send the five guppies in now 'cause we'll be tidying up here by the time they drop and set down on Main Street."]

Peña's eyebrows frown, "You're on schedule?"

["We're just a smidge-plus ahead, me matie!"]

"That's damned good to hear!"

["I thought the mad-knob was over-planning this bender but, now that I look at it, the planning paid off!"]

"Looks like it did, Pogo!"

["I have to give the General credit for being thorough. We be makin' mince of tha place!"]

0101001-010100-00101101-00110001-00110011-00110000-00110000

Just like all hypersonic fighters and transports, high-pressure engine bypass is bled off and channeled through the fuselage to exit the ship along its leading edges. This does two things, it carries away heat and makes the fuselage even more slippery at high speed. The resulting vapor chimes flash all over the 101b amidsthip as it levels out at a brisk Mach 2.8.

Coming out of the dive at 150 meters altitude Jessica is still kicking up water, but it's nothing like the roster tail that trailed after her when she was below 100 meters just two minutes ago. She can go faster, like maybe Mach 5.6 at this altitude if needed, but here she wants agility over greater speed.

Jessica has already shot nine of their Djinn out of the sky but coming towards her are a few of the new F51e Enfield fighters that fly in pairs with the Djinn flying as escort. These are incredibly capable interceptors, but they are the only fighters retrofitted with their newest AG-drive Hornet missile. The Hornets are loaded on recessed mounts under the wings, but this configuration comes with a slight problem in negative-G. Nose over hard above Mach 1.5 and the wings will snap right off, which is why the Djinn are flying with them.

See, with AG-drive their Hornet won't sputter out but it can only hit Mach 3 in a straight line, so all the target has to do is to run. To keep the Hornet in play, the Djinn work like Australian Shepherds to corral the target for the Hornet to get close and do its magic.

With four Enfields closing, that's thirty-two Hornets, they just let loose four of those damned things so Jessica quietly says, "shit!"

As the Co-op fighters from the north, west and south are spreading out to surround the 101b, and the fighters from the east are still 120 kilometers out and charging in, Samantha gives Jessica a big grin and asks, "Sooo, what's the plan, Red?"

With Jessica pitching the ship up, she launches the last three of her Hydrapedes and, "Shoot 'em down? Sound good to you?"

"Ya think we're gonna get out of this bloody mess?"

Jessica has her doubts, serious doubts, but she must convey confidence or she will emotionally fold up, "Yea, sure, but we're gonna hav'ta take a few more hits along the way."

"Aaah, this hull was designed for that, right?"

Jessica nods and laughs, "Purdy fuckin' loud, wasn't it?"

Samantha laughs back at her, with, "Dunno mate, I be pissin'

myself when tha thang rang our bells!"

Via the tacnet, Jessica commands all eight of her Hydrapedes to climb, and as they do, Jessica pulls the ship into a vertical climb, saying, "I'm right there with ya!"

"Pissing yourself?"

"Hell yea!" She pickles off the last four of her Centipede-Mew missiles, as well as six of her eight 20/20 bomb dispensers. Once clear, tracking the Hornets coming in from the east, and noticing three more centipedes coming in from the west and south, Jessica cuts power and pulls the sidestick back, pushing the ship into a bone crunching pitch over, while calling out, "G-squeeze, everybody!"

Samantha is in a rearward facing seat, and with blood pooling in her face, making her complexion look pink, she grits her teeth and grunts over the strain, "Arse over tits we go, aye!"

With the ship now diving, Jessica asks, "Fully sick?"

Samantha snorts, followed by, "I'm gonna spew, I am!"

Pulling the ships nose up, and leveling off from the dive, Jessica smiles, "I accept the challenge!"

"What challenge, you say?"

"To make ya puke!"

"It's not gonna take much to get me to yak, babe!"

With all seven missiles converging on them, Jessica has an intense look on her face when she calls out, "Hold on!"

The defensive scorpion guns are hammering away at the three Co-op Centipedes as well as the four Hornets that are straining to catch up from the other direction. At the exact same time all her Centipede-Mew missiles finally fire and two race out towards the east after the Enfields, the third one heads out for the two fighters in the west, and the fourth one is turning south for that pair.

Inside a few quick seconds, the two Djinn in the west, and two in the south, fire mini-missiles and cannon at the two Mew coming at their faces. Both missiles are destroyed but its nine Micropedes blossom out of each one and blow both pairs of ships out of the sky. The two Hydrapedes that were climbing up after them now turn for the three Djinn coming in from the north. At the same time those fighters are shot down by the lone Hydrapede zipping up from underneath.

All three Hydrapede droids turn towards Jessica's Babyback.

Right before the two Mew reach the Enfields, the Hornets that were after Jessica have all been blown out of the sky, but the twelve

mini-missiles they pickle off now twist and turn and converge on her. Between four of the defensive guns, it's own Micropedes launched from canisters, and the stinger jumping in, surprisingly five of these things manage to get through this onslaught and hit the Babyback.

Jessica has already rolled the ship over to keep these missiles from hitting the underside. The hammering on the armored hull again freaks Stiller's family out where they flinch and jump in their seats as the 1k-KGE bombs go off and rattles the ship from the aft.

In the east, the two Centipede-Mew that were racing towards the two flights are easily shot down by the Enfields, but the eighteen Micropedes they launch as they are knocked out are next to impossible to hit. All eight fighters scatter but they still lose five of their number with two Enfield and three Djinn going down.

Taking stock, Jessica has three Hydrapedes to the west, two in the east that are trailing the surviving Enfields, and three taking up positions around her in a defensive Red Shell mode. It was here she notices seven more flights of four Co-op fighters appearing on the tacnet that are charging in from high altitude.

Jessica takes a long-deep breath and opens a channel to RRF command over Rongo, "Aaaah, guys, this is Scarab. I was wondering if ya have anybody available to clear my tail over Maui?"

Yemi Kagame answers with a less pronounce accent from before, ["Hey Red! We noticed your hands have been full."]

Jessica was expecting to hear from her father directly, but Kagame is good enough, "Ouchie! Can you lend a girl a hand?"

["We'll be popping in overhead 'bout thirty-seconds, and will be able to make a difference inside three minutes. Will that work?"]

Jessica is surprised, "That's quick, I'll take it!"

["Rongo was a bust. They knew we were coming."]

"Okay, what's Buzzard Chow doin'?"

["Your father is pulling everything out and throwing it at Maui. We're launching on primary now."]

"They swarmed all over me the second I got in the air. I take it Rongo was a bad idea."

["It gave 'em a heads up we didn't need to give."]

In a flash, Jessica reviews the tacnet status of the battlespace surrounding her. As the three fighters in the east continue to egress the area, she notices seven flights of mixed Enfield and Djinns, totaling twenty-eight BDF fighters, continue to close in. At that very second a squadron from the Annex, that is sixteen Thunderbirds with a Warthog

gunship in tow, pops in above her at 150 kilometers altitude.

As they start their dive, straight down, Jessica feels a weight lifted off her shoulders, "I see ya, Ouchie!"

Kagame asks, ["You be holding on, girl?"]

The BDF launches Centipedes and Hornets early, so Jessica nods and, "Yea, I can hold."

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