

Wolf Squadron

Year 5

"I should have stayed on that island," Dreya muttered, splaying her hands across the controls as she readied herself with a deep breath.

"What was that, Alpha?" Roth asked over the coms.

"Nothing, Rookie. On your left," she bit out and slammed a lever, feeling her ship sing as the wings snapped from horizontal to vertical position, pivoting around her cockpit on their axis, to allow her to slip through a small gap between his ship and the Behemoth Class Transport they were engaged in combat with.

If they could keep the Behemoth busy long enough for it to use up their energy reserves and be forced to resort to backup, a choice would have to be made by the captain to either abandon their weapons or drop their electro-shield in order to power them. Wolf Squadron had ways to break down an electro-shield, so they were hoping for the former. Unfortunately, this captain seemed more daring than most and was clearly determined to drag the fight on as long as possible.

Dreya knew that if it went on for too long her squadron would tire and start to make mistakes. Fighter crafts like theirs were made for fast combat, getting in and out as quick and dirty as possible, and it seemed the captain of the Behemoth was well aware of that. What he didn't know, however, was that Wolf Squadron wasn't just any squadron of small Fighters. They were the best in the system, and like the animal they are named after, they knew how to wear down their prey.

"They've got to be low on power by now!" Y'scartes groaned, cutting underneath the Behemoth and out of Dreya's sight.

"Easy, Blue," she replied. Y'scartes was not known for their patience, but their marksmanship was unparalleled. A fact they proved seconds later with a cheer over the coms and the spray of debris as they took out one of the Behemoth's big guns.

"One round at a time," Allegra said as her ship dropped in behind Dreya's.

Together the two of them dove into the dark beneath the Behemoth. There Allegra settled her craft right in behind the broken gun, taking the opportunity to unload her lasers into the hull. The lasers wouldn't penetrate it but it might make them throw up their shields again, forcing them to divide their remaining power.

"Stay there, Saber," Dreya told her. "They can't hit you with that gun in the way."

"Roger that."

As Dreya came out the other side of the Behemoth she flicked her screen to take note of the rest of her squadron.

Y'scartes had dropped clear after blowing the gun, leaving just Allegra, Dreya, and James close to the ship. The rest of the team was spread out. They flew in a swirling pattern, at times drifting close before dancing away again, in a well practiced maneuver meant to keep the Behemoth busy while the four quicker ships dealt with the guns.

Dreya flipped her wings again so she could flatten as close to the side of the Behemoth as possible and pushed forward, picking up speed as she shot alongside the kilometer long ship, keeping her lasers quiet in an effort to avoid notice as long as possible. Just as she drew close to the next big gun the Behemoth suddenly heaved into a barrel roll towards her, a move not even she had predicted as most ships this size were usually carrying cargo that shouldn't be tossed around too much.

She cursed and pulled up, thankful for the speed she'd gained on her run as she rocketed into the blackness above them, narrowly avoiding being clipped by a protruding loading deck. Allegra wasn't so lucky. As Dreya reoriented herself and spun around, the display lit up in orange, alerting her to the damage her squad-mate had taken from the impact of the broken turret gun.

Orange was okay, Allegra could still fly with orange.

"You good, Saber?" she asked, not taking her eyes off the Behemoth as it finished its roll and sent a spray of rounds at her. Thankfully the momentum of their roll sent the shot wide.

"I'm ok, Alpha," Allegra's voice came through after a few too many heartbeats of silence. "Gonna need an escort home."

Dreya dove forwards again, intent on distracting the Behemoth long enough for Allegra to get clear.

"Mammoth and X, get Saber back to base. Blue, come back here and finish off these guns. That roll was a risk, they must be getting desperate," Dreya grit her teeth and went back for the gun she'd been aiming for, dropping one of her precious few tiger torpedoes at it. She only had four of them and they were expensive to resupply but she needed to be rid of that gun so Allegra could get clear. Dreya felt a slight jolt as the release mechanism snapped back into place and then the self targeting torpedo was off, speeding for the gun she'd aimed it at.

Dreya didn't stick around to watch it hit, she spun off in a barrel roll of her own, flipping around the edge of the rectangular ship and pulling clear again, letting her automatic systems watch for lasers while she opened a public channel. She'd called on them before and been ignored but now that she was winning this fight, the captain just might listen.

"Behemoth Class Transport Number 23764, this is Commander Alpha of Wolf Squadron, acting under the command of the Cosma Conclave. Cool down your guns and allow us to escort you to Derentius for questioning. You are flying an uncharted path in an unauthorized, heavily armoured, ship. Surrender, or we will be forced to take lethal action."

No response. A full minute later the assumed-to-be broken turret gun on the bottom of the ship suddenly snapped around, aiming straight at her, and fired a single shot. Dreya easily avoided it

and swallowed the bile that rose in her throat. Lethal action it was going to have to be.

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Later, a knock at the door drew Dreya out from the cocoon of blankets she was hiding in. She jerked to her feet and touched the implant under the skin of her temple to activate her mask, stiffening her spine as she headed over to open the door.

"Hey Alpha, Rookie said you wanted me to report once I was out of medical," Allegra smiled her odd toothy grin that always looked a little sad to Dreya, because of the way her fangs pulled the corners of her mouth down.

Dreya forced a tight smile in return, "I did. Would've come myself but you know how I feel about medics."

"You're not setting foot in there unless death is on the line. I'm aware. Lucky for you, I'm cleared to fly. Tore a chunk out of my leg from getting tossed around in my cockpit, but that's why I have three of them, right?"

This time Dreya actually did laugh. Allegra was one of the Portang, known for their strength and endurance, much of which had to do with their three muscular legs that lent extra power to their compact forms. Some also had multiple arms, depending on the region of their planet they were from. There were two Portang in Wolf Squadron, Allegra and her brother Derring, whose call sign was simply "X."

"Get some rest, Allegra. Thanks for reporting in," Dreya rested a hand on her shoulder and squeezed gently. "You're cleared from repairs tomorrow, I'll fix your ship myself."

"You honour me, Commander," Allegra bowed, her third leg stretching behind her in a gesture of her people that signified their trust in the person they paid deference to. Dreya responded by splaying her thumb and first two fingers and twisting her wrist in their squadron's salute.

Allegra lingered, watching Dreya carefully, but Dreya just offered her a smile, "Goodnight, Alle," she said and then turned to head back into her quarters. She didn't have the energy for companionship tonight.

"Goodnight Drey," Allegra murmured as the door slid shut between them.

Dreya stood staring at the closed door for a few moments longer and then stumbled to bed, dropping her mask and collapsing into the sheets. She fell asleep quickly, exhaustion winning over her turbulent thoughts, and dreamed of the sound of waves sighing against black sandy shores.