

Landing at Persatra Aerodrome

Fieran flew back the way he'd come, leading eight aeroplanes back along the column of airships he and his squadron were escorting. Along the other side of the airships, eight more flyers headed forward to relieve the eight aeroplanes scouting ahead of the airships. More aeroplanes scouted above and below the airships, ensuring that no Mongavarians could ambush the supply airships.

Below, the thick trees of Tarenhiel's forest stretched into the distance to the west. To the east, the deep gray of the sea and crashing waves disappeared into the horizon. Directly below, the rocky coastline marked the line between sea and shore with only the occasional sandy beach to break up the rocks and cliffs.

Along the bays and inlets, small elven villages tucked into the trees while old fashioned wooden boats trawled the waters for fish and lobsters. Farther out to sea, the large iron merchant ships filled the sea lanes, traveling between the Alliance Kingdoms and to the continent beyond, protected by an escort of Alliance warships.

Fieran passed the rear scouts as they headed forward again. He pressed the button on the control stick. "All clear back here?"

"Yes. Nothing to report." Lije's voice crackled over the radio. He was the leader of the aeroplanes they were passing.

"Nothing besides that fishing trawler down there." One of the other flyboys spoke up over the radio. "Those elves seem to be celebrating something. Maybe they caught an extra large fish?"

"I think they're waving at us, you ninny." This came from another pilot.

"Are you sure? I've never seen elves that exuberant."

“Well, besides Aylia. Maybe they’re relatives.”

Fieran didn’t chide his pilots for their chatter. If Lt. Rothilion was in range, he was probably grinding his teeth. But now that Fieran was in charge of the squadron, he would command it *his* way. Including allowing chatter over the airwaves.

He led his group a few more minutes to the rear before he gave the order to turn and head back to the front.

They passed the next cluster of aeroplanes on its way to the rear. Even at top speed, the airships were far slower than the aeroplanes. Fieran had set up the rotation to keep the aeroplanes constantly moving while not getting too far ahead of the slower airships.

As he neared the front of the column once again, Lt. Rothilion’s somewhat supercilious tones filled the radio. “Capt. Laesornysh, Persatra Aerodrome lies ahead.”

“Linshi, Lt. Rothilion.” Fieran thanked the elven lieutenant in elvish, then switched back to Escarlish so that the entire squadron would understand. “Half-Breed Squadron, we’re approaching Persatra Aerodrome. As we arrive, set up a station circling overhead and stay out of the airships’ way while they dock.”

The acknowledgements came over the radio as the column of airships turned slightly west to better line up with the approach to Persatra with the sea winds at their backs.

Fieran couldn’t hear whatever the lead airship’s captain said to the aerodrome below, given that the airships’ main radios operated on a different, longer range frequency than the radios in the aeroplanes.

But the captain must have said something for, ahead, the tops of the trees parted, opening a gap large enough for an airship to sink downward into the safety of the trees.

As Fieran joined the front ranks of aeroplanes circling overhead, the first of the airships drifted downward.

More of the trees parted, revealing a wide wooden platform grown right into the trees, high above the forest floor.

Fieran tipped his aeroplane farther onto its side to better study what counted as an airfield here in Tarenhiel. That wooden platform was far narrower than any airstrip he'd ever used for landing before. Not to mention, the aeroplanes didn't have brakes. On a normal airfield, the tailskid dug into the dirt to slow the aeroplane. But that wouldn't work here.

His flyboys might regret mocking the new squadron now taking up the job of protecting Dar Goranth, considering this was the airstrip those elves learned on.

"Lt. Rothilion." Fieran continued to speak in Escarlish so the whole squadron would hear. Hopefully Lt. Rothilion would have the decency to switch to elvish if he felt the need to revert to his snobbish ways. "Any tips for landing at Persatra Aerodrome? We, the human half of the squadron, would rather not embarrass the elven half during the landing."

Surely even if Lt. Rothilion didn't particularly care about being helpful, he would at least provide advice, if only to spare his own pride. Having members of his squadron perform badly in front of his elven peers wouldn't be a good look.

There was a rather long pause over the radio. Then something that might have been a sigh before Lt. Rothilion's voice came over the radio. "There will be elves directing the landing with flags. Green flags mean you are cleared to land. Red means you are waved off. Try to land as centered as possible and touch down as early as possible. We elves use our magic to reach through our aeroplane to the platform to grab it while the elves of the ground crew use their

magic to wrap around the aeroplane to slow and eventually stop it. Those of you without plant magic will have to simply rely on the ground crew.”

Then stopping the aeroplane would be in the hands of whatever elves were using their magic. That wasn’t concerning at all. At least Merrik would put in a good showing with his landing.

“Linshi. Anything else we should know?” Fieran circled his aeroplane again as another airship disappeared below the trees.

“If the elves determine you are going too fast to stop or that they can’t stop you in time, the elves along the runway will switch from waving green flags to waving red flags.” Lt. Rothilion spoke nonchalantly, as if such an occurrence was normal. “You will then want to give your aeroplane full power and attempt to take off again. If you do not manage it, the trees should catch your aeroplane. But it will damage the trees so I would advise against crashing if you can manage it.”

“What about damage to *us*?” Pretty Face broke into airwaves.

“Pilots and aeroplanes are replaceable. Trees that generations of elves have tended and cherished from saplings are not.” Lt. Rothilion’s tone returned to that one of snooty superiority.

Fieran quickly pressed the talk button before any of his flyboys could snap back with some kind of sarcastic reply. As entertaining as that would be, he needed to foster squadron cohesion. “You heard the lieutenant. Let’s put in a good showing of our skills. We have the honor and reputation of the Half-Breed Squadron to uphold.”

That little speech earned Fieran a chorus of cheers over the radio. Mostly from the flyboys of Flight B, though Aylia gave a cheer and a few of the other elves made more polite and restrained acknowledgments.

Fieran really hoped his squadron was up for this. They'd survived the stiff crosswinds of Dar Goranth. How hard could it be to land on a wooden platform several hundred feet in the air?

"Permission for Flight A to land first?" Lt. Rothilion's voice turned extra stiff.

"Permission granted." Fieran wasn't sure if the elf lieutenant had offered because he wanted to be helpful or because he wanted to get his squadron out of the way before Flight B crashed and burned.

As the last airship disappeared below the tree cover, an elf waving green flags appeared at the end of the wooden runway.

One by one, the elven pilots of Flight A circled until they were headed into the wind. They appeared to shut off their engines and glide the last few hundred yards down to the platform.

As soon as their aeroplanes' wheels touched down and stayed down, vines glowing green with elven magic wrapped around the aeroplane, slowing the aeroplane rather than immediately halting it.

The aeroplanes rolled to a halt, and the vines wheeled the flyers to a platform at the very end of the runway. The platform lowered, disappearing into the shadows beneath the trees before another platform took its place.

"That looks...difficult." Pretty Face spoke over the radios.

"And Flight A learned how to fly off this platform? I'm amazed any of them survived." Lije gave a slight whistle as another aeroplane landed.

"It was a near thing on a few occasions." Aylia sounded far too cheerful.

"You are next, Lt. Daemaer." Lt. Rothilion had gone back to stuffily commanding.

“Oh, whoops.” Aylia laughed. One of the elven aeroplanes dropped lowered and lined up on the runway.

“In case you were not aware, Flight A can still hear you, Flight B.” It wasn’t a command to stop talking, as he might have issued when he’d been the acting commander of the squadron, but Lt. Rothilion’s tone still hinted that he’d like to command it.

“Oh, we’re aware,” Pretty Face replied cheerily.

As the flyboys subsided after that, Fieran didn’t step in. He’d just started to get a handle on commanding Flight B. He had to find his footing all over again now that he was the captain of the whole squadron.

As the last of Flight A landed, Fieran pushed the talk button. “All right, Flight B. Time to show the elves of Persatra Aerodrome what you’ve got. Merrik, lead us off. You can help talk the rest down once you are on the ground.”

There was only a small hesitation before Merrik acknowledged. Like Fieran, he would normally wait to land until last. After all, now that Fieran was captain over the whole squadron, Merrik was the commander of Flight B.

But out of the whole Flight, Fieran trusted that Merrik would have no difficulty landing. Yet unlike the elves of Flight A, Merrik might have an idea of how to give advice to the others.

Merrik lined up on the runway and guided his aeroplane out of the sky and onto the airstrip with as much grace as the elven pilots.

One by one, the rest of the aeroplanes of Flight B touched down. There were a few harried moments when one of the aeroplanes crabbed sideways before correcting, and two of the flyboys had to be waved around to try again. But none crashed. So at least they had nothing to be ashamed of.