

Shuttle Piloting Lessons

One of the most basic skills of an adult is driving a vehicle. Nowadays there are shuttles, which can be equated with flying cars. Every soldier must be able to control a military shuttle. That's why this was an integral part of the training plan for Carter and his comrades.

On Monday they had their first vehicle training with chief mechanic Willis and they were curious to see what it all was about. Willis stood there as usual calmly by the hangar and smoked an e-cigarette. He saw them coming but just kept puffing. »Well, guys, what's going on?«, he asked the group. They didn't really know if this was a serious question. He just laughed and went ahead to the garages. There the gates were already open and some mechanics were repairing shuttles. Willis stopped and turned to them.

»Not long ago we were in space and you lost your flying virginity. And as in real life, most of you enjoyed it after a short time. Since the fighters are so small, agile and, let's face it, really fun, one wonders why they're not simply used to move around the planet. Of course, you could do that and on besieged planets, it's done for obvious reasons, but a fighter is really expensive on the one hand and on the other hand only made for one person and without cargo or for landing on uneven surfaces. The main reason, however, is that the propulsion of a spaceship consumes much more energy than a ›land vehicle‹. A Talon propulsion is valuable and too expensive for cross-country travel.«

They passed some shuttles and took a closer look at the vehicles. Most of them were military standard. They were wide, slightly rounded

at the edges, olive green and had blackened windows for the driver. They had recesses at all four corners where the thrusters were located. Landed, the underbody of a shuttle was hydraulically slightly extended, like a plate. »This is the normal shuttle for all-purpose use. The landing skids are currently being reworked because a plate is not exactly suitable for every terrain. Otherwise, these things are indestructible and last for several decades. Every soldier must be able to fly such a thing.«

They also saw transport shuttles, attack shuttles, and a civilian shuttle. They also saw a hunting motorcycle, a so-called hoverpod. These floating motorcycles were longish, were also driven by nozzles and had a long, double-barreled cannon on board. Some could even fire rockets sideways.

»Most shuttles are intended for free transport on a planetary surface. Only very few models can handle a low orbital flight. The Hoverpods are designed for very fast and agile locomotion and are often used on new worlds for exploration. They are much more difficult to detect than the other two types of reconnaissance vehicles. GOTOs and Goats are safer, but easier to detect by radar. We don't have any here either, because they are so expensive that all existing models are in use.«

They ran past all the shuttles into a garage where there was another vehicle. It was a tank. Carter knew pictures of the tanks of the old days with chains and combustion engine. This new model could float up to one meter above the ground and had rounded edges instead of hard corners. The turret gun was higher up, giving the whole vehicle a greater height. It also had three gun barrels, one big one in the middle and two slimmer and shorter ones on the side. Willis crossed his arms: »This is the latest model of the Bullhorn-Dyke tank. Heavy main gun, two heavy

MGs and optional upgrade with anti-aircraft missiles. This thing is absolutely devastating and massively armored. Only tank pilots learn to drive it. You don't have to be able to do that, but I thought you might be interested in what it looks like. If this one goes your way, I'd take cover.«

The tank looked quite impressive and Carter was secretly happy not to drive such a monster. He liked the agile and fast vehicles better than struggling with a heavy powerhouse. In general, one could start to learn to fly a shuttle on Utopia from the age of 17. Of course, this was not the case with the working classes, where only actual shuttle pilots were allowed to complete this training. With the privileged, the parents usually paid for the flight training and then bought their protégés much too expensive shuttles. Accidents were rather rare because even the cheapest, oldest model had comprehensive safety systems that reliably prevented crashes and collisions caused by negligence.

The recruits were taken back to the shuttles. As there were only a limited number of shuttles, they were divided into groups of four, each accompanied and supervised by an experienced pilot. Carter was able to secure one along with Kelly, Leena, and Rod before Willis came up with the idea of determining any groups. Rod was the first, but it wasn't particularly exciting as he had been able to fly for several years. So they took off quickly and flew around for a while. The pilot wanted to test their knowledge and talents. Kelly followed up on Rod, which led to a lot of sagging and jerky changes of direction because she had never flown before. The shuttles she knew were all autopiloted and she didn't have to do anything. Also when it was Leena's turn, the flight was more than adventurous as she had absolutely no experience. The pilot had his hands full trying to keep the shuttle halfway stable while Leena was rip-

ping the wheel like crazy. Little by little he explained to her which levers and knobs she had to use and how she operated the wheel most skilfully. Finally, it was Carter's turn. He had already made the first flight attempts with his father or Michael at the age of fourteen and was meanwhile a quite decent pilot. Since flying shuttles and spaceships meant an unparalleled degree of freedom, he had always been fascinated by it. Correspondingly fluent, he was able to take over the controls and carry out some maneuvers without errors. They always flew around the base and stayed away from the city. The whole flight lasted about four hours, one for each. When they landed, Willis expected them back at the hangar. »What was it like? Sure, for some of you it's an old hat, but even those of you who've already been on the road could learn a lot from us. The pilots by your side have tested and evaluated your previous knowledge and skills. From the next lesson, you will be divided into two groups: Beginners and advanced pilots. Beginners will have the basic control and guidance of a shuttle as the goal of this lesson. The others will learn new flight maneuvers, techniques and tricks to expand their knowledge. This will make it easier for you to choose specialization as a pilot later if you are interested. «

He drove his hand through his hair and explained to them the different pilot classes in the army. There were shuttle pilots, transport pilots, fighter squadrons, reconnaissance pilots, ground pilots for tanks, large ship pilots and the officer's career of the pilot class through which one could later command warships. Of course, there were also other specializations such as special commandos or front fighters, which also had to have pilot skills. From that day on, they had at least one shuttle flight hour a week and one fighter flight hour a week in the orbit of Utopia.

Carter preferred the flight in a fighter with Jenny much more. Especially when he had successfully completed all the basic flight exercises and even broke a time record, the advanced simulations with fire exercises came up. The weapons were not really fired, but pressing the fire button created a corresponding resonance in the simulation.