

### **Combat Patrol – Fiction Submission #3 – GN La'an (#10540)**

The Warrior task group continued to move through its current operational area, weaving a loose route in a complex formation as picket ships rotated between inner and outer defence cordons, fighters flying between them and a constant stream of utility vessels going about their daily business. The Warrior in particular was a hive of activity with several dozen Zero-G suited engineers and technicians operating on the dorsal hull, carrying out maintenance tasks while a watchful tug stood guard as their safety number. TIE Interceptors running mock assault runs tracked across the Destroyer's flight path, running angles and working out the blind arcs of the hull mounted weaponry, with smaller shuttles carrying out personnel and equipment transfers with the rest of the fleet.

La'an watched this ballet unfold from the briefing room abaft the main command bridge, its broad transparisteel windows almost filling the bulkhead with their sharp, segmented shape. The daily situation brief for flag officers and ship captains had finished up earlier than expected, the captains in person and holographic form having returned to their own vessels. The scheduled brief for the Warrior's own squadron commander and flight leaders would start in a little over a half hour, but as usual he was first there by a long margin. Having moved away from ship, wing and squadron command and taken on a line role as a flight leader he was rather enjoying the twilight years of his service. The EH was perhaps unique in the fact that it permitted its veterans and senior officers to return to front line combat rather than wasting their talents in a civilian recruitment or occupying a distant HQ role when what they really needed, as always, were steady hands on the controls and helms of their fighters and capital vessels. It invariably made for an interesting mix of personalities and experience, Theta in particular had become the stomping ground of many flag officers who for the sake of functionality had accepted the rank of Colonel or General. It made for an oddly relaxed atmosphere as for most progression in rank or award was simply irrelevant.

The command bridge, visible through the briefing rooms broad and open portal, was equally balletic – a quiet but steady background hum of noise, consoles and computers chiming, low voices discussing reports or providing information to section heads and officers. Petty officers prowled their respective pits and areas, relaying the wider picture to the officers stalking the walkways above. The fighter controllers working at the rear of the raised bridge were more obvious from their flight suits, their black overalls in stark contrast to the paler uniforms of fleet officers and ratings. A pair of Stormtroopers stood like white columns at either side of the armoured blast door controlling access to the cavernous bridge, while the officer of the watch maintained his own vigil from the front of the bridge, supported by a sensor and weapons officer, as well as the duty engineer – in this case a rather stunning brunette on whose station it was difficult not to linger for a moment. Admiral Plif ran a tight ship, but one not reflecting the prejudice of the original Empire – while the vast majority of the crew was human, a number of other species were intermingled – particularly those of local species, long associated with the EH. Perhaps more telling almost a third of the crew was female, a combination of pragmatic use of limited personnel numbers and sheer common sense – how the Empire had ever conquered the galaxy by using one gender of one species still, on occasion, made him wonder.

La'an returned his gaze to space as a larger vessel drew his eye, a sleek Raider class corvette running up the destroyer's flank as it moved to take up a different position in the defence – or perhaps not, the corvette slowing to run parallel to the midsection of the Warrior's armoured hull. He had always admired the Raider, a light and racy vessel intended to support TIEs in fighter engagements, having served with over a dozen of them in his career. They tended to attract young officers with reputations to make or regain, which generally meant they would press on into harm's way – their captains were invariably popular amongst the pilot cadre for pulling them from the fire or acting as a recovery vessel for pilots in damaged vessels or drifting on life support having ejected.

"Ah, glad to see you here early – I've been looking for you" La'an turned as his CMDR's voice sounded from behind him, Colonel Schueler leaning against the bulkhead with his arms crossed and a wry smile on his face.

"My fault – the comlink was off and I got distracted by the view" La'an smiled back, nodding his head at the corvette.

"Of course you did." Schueler turned to look over his shoulder at the engineering stations, "In any case you're in the right direction. We're not required at this brief, we've had a separate mission assigned. Looks like a combat patrol to look for that Nebulon you picked up on the last mission. We've been scouting with fighters and shuttles, looks like the Hammer is doing it with frigates."

"So we're taking a corvette?" La'an frowned, weighing up the firepower imbalance "I assume we're bringing friends?"

"We are indeed – while the Sentinel is out for maintenance yours truly will be taking command of this patrol, I'll be on the corvette to assist its captain, the rest of the flight is staying with the Warrior. Your flight will be flying escort, with a pair of Defenders from Rho as well – between us we're looking at a half squadron of torpedo carrying, shielded fighters and a corvette with the shields and sensors to get us on target and out again if this goes south." Schueler's joking tone became serious as he relayed the mission details. "Any issues?"

"None – just enjoy the bridge over there, with the size of their crew they don't cater for passengers – enjoy standing up a lot. When do we leave?" La'an replied.

"We're out of here in 15, I'm transferring... in about 5 minutes, crap, that's why they're hanging about. Rest of your flight is stowed already and ready to go, your gear is onboard. Looking at 12 to 18 hours mission time so get ready for a long shift."

It was going to be a long day, La'an thought to himself as he followed Schueler back towards the turbolift. His muscles ached in sympathy at the thought of such a long stint in the cockpit...

