

### **Into the Heart – RTF Fiction Submission #5 – GN La’an (#10540)**

The pain in his back became uncomfortable after another hour of inexorable progress, La’an and Horus drifting slowly through the belt of asteroids and spatial debris at the perimeter of the system. Checking his chrono it looked like mission time thus far was about to hit 14 hours, while that had been broken up with periods of inactivity in hyperspace it was hardly a restorative experience – half snatched minutes of sleep or rest tinged with the constant possibility of being dragged into action by a gravity well or any one of a number of mechanical or technical dangers.

The two TIEs were coasting on low power, using judicious thrusters and passive sensors to slip past the larger obstacles, relying on shields to burn off the smaller debris. It was a game of skill tinged with real danger, exercise or not the impact of chunks of dead moon or proto-planet the size of a capital ship and formed of solid rock or iron would leave them both dead. Very clearly and categorically, with very little more than the crump of compacting durasteel and the momentary flash of detonating engines and weapons.

Initial scans of the system had suggested that the belt was between 120-130km thick, but after an hour they had cleared that distance with no indication of the rocks disappearing from view. Part of that was an illusion, his vision so filled with moving obstacles that discerning much beyond was simply too difficult for his eyes to achieve, while passive sensors were short range and limited by the distortion of so much rock and metal in constant movement. As he was thinking that the field would never end he began to notice additional detail and a sudden thinning of the rocks around him, sending a warning pulse through a tight, line of sight communication link with Horus he slowed his approach further, watching Horus do the same.

As open space began to reassert itself La’an scanned the surrounding warily, reacquainting himself with the systems arrangements – a dull yellow star with a single gas giant and a cluster of moons. A half dozen dwarf planets on outer orbits, erratic in their path and little more than large asteroids that had broken clear of the belt and become snagged by the stars gravity. The gas giant was visible against the face of the star but little else was clear. At this range in the outer system he could make out little else and certainly no sign of an ISD led battle group – which of course did not mean that they were not there...

“We’re going to have to go bold – we can’t get anything from here. I’m going to drive in hard at the core – make like a rookie on a blind recon run. Keep your sensors passive, if things look like they’re hotting up then disengage and take word back. Be wary, that picket line of theirs may have reorganised or reformed.” La’an made his orders clear, Horus acknowledging with a double click over the link.

La’an lit his engines, bringing his sensors up to full power and storming in system at maximum acceleration, calculating that at his current rate of advance he had approximately 15 minutes to run to get within scanning range of the gas giant’s orbit. If anything was lurking it was going to be there, where cover was available. If there was any luck at all he would be able to make a clean sweep and get out without further attention, but the odds of late were often stacked against him by what seemed to be an increasingly hostile galaxy.

The sensors started to ping with hard returns just as his own early warning system registered active sensors turned in his direction, far more powerful than his own. It looked like his luck had just run out...