

Not Yours to Take – Part I

By *Tanorath-drgn*

Snr Captain Tano'rath
Cmdr, DES Defiant

“What do you want, Telricktus?” I snapped as I stared down the I.I.S. officer on my view-screen, “You interrupted my lunch with a priority one, it better be fucking excellent.”

Telricktus, with his usual cool and calm demeanour looked back at me, paused, then checked his screen. “Oh, my apologies, it was meant to be a four, not a one, my finger must have slipped. Do you need to be somewhere...?”

“Nah. I’m here now, so lets get this over with,” I replied with a snort, “What is it this time?”

“Well, I’m supposed to give you advance notice of a possible mission, so I am here to do that,” Telricktus replied, regaining his composure and adjusting his uniform, “We’re working a case and we will call on you soon.”

“Five minutes isn’t advance notice, Telricktus,” I replied with a snort as I rolled my eyes, “What is it for?”

“Oh, you have a week to get ready for this one,” He replied with a chuckle, “You’re getting a temporary transfer to a research station to assist with an ongoing operation.”

“Do I have any say in this?” I replied, folding my arms. Asking this question is a formality at this point – we both know what the answer is going to be.

“It’s already been cleared by Command, but we can reassign your First Officer instead if you do not wish to go,” Telricktus remarked with a shrug, “There are certain...parameters involved that narrows the candidate pool significantly.”

“You are *not* sending Tal for whatever the fuck this is!” I snarled, thumping the floor with my tail, “and what the fuck kind of parameter leads you to only pick a Fleet Captain for this?”

“All will be revealed when you arrive,” Telricktus replied with a chuckle, “Now, do you want me to send you the brief?”

I sighed and nodded.

“Alright then, Captain,” He replied as he tapped away at his console and the message came through, “So, as we both know, people lose things all the time, yeah?”

I nodded along as I downloaded the file and let the malware scanner do its thing, “Yeah, and then you find all the random shit when you clean your room.”

Telricktus wagged a finger and chuckled, “*Usually*, yes, but not anymore. Besides, I doubt you’ll find an entire prototype car under your bed this weekend.”

I frowned. “What.”

“So it started with the usual small items, socks, pants, sometimes a fork or a laptop, things that people tend to lose,” Telricktus replied, rubbing his temples, “the list goes on, but over time, bigger and more

important things have vanished into thin air – in one case, a ship lost it's entire mainframe and was left adrift for hours before the crew could bodge a fix together.”

“Right, so someone is stealing from us, it seems? Surely, a cloaked ship wouldn't be able to do this, they'd be detected.” I replied, rubbing my chin, “Wormhole tech?”

“That's what we suspect, the residual radiation and particles indicate the use of a short-lived artificial wormhole that they somehow shot a tractor beam through,” Telricktus replied, tapping away on his console again and pulling up an analysis of an attack site, “We can't pinpoint where the origin is, but we have a general location. All that's needed is to get someone in and let them call us...don't worry, we're not sending you for that, forgive me, but you're not exciting enough. We're sending something else and you're there to facilitate it.”

I raised an eyeridge, opening the brief to find that the contents of the package were redacted. Of course. “I suppose I'll find out what it is when I get there?”

“Yup. I've also arranged for your ship to get a minor refit close by, but I doubt we'll need a quick response for now. It'll take time for us to pinpoint the signal and get a location.” Telricktus remarked, picking at one of his finger-claws, “Command isn't happy about this, obviously, but this wormhole technology is also far too useful to blow up, so try not to start a war when it comes to it, Captain.”

“Well, it depends on how they respond to being taken to task,” I replied with a low growl, “Our technology is not theirs to take.”

Telricktus simply nodded, “That's also correct, but at least try. Either way, good day, sir, I'll meet you on the station when you arrive to hand the package over to you.”

“Got it, I'll see you then,” I replied with a sigh as I closed the channel.

So much for lunch, it would be stone cold and someone would have tossed it into the bin by now. Instead, I went and grabbed a sandwich before pulling Talorath, who had just ended his shift, aside and nearly had to drag him by the tail to my office. I gave him a quick briefing as my console dinged with new orders from Command, telling us to put in for a refit and a letter detailing my temporary post.

Of course, Tal didn't like it, he never likes I.I.S. missions and neither do I, but what needs to be done has to be done. It's pretty clear cut anyway, stealing is a crime and putting other people at risk while doing it only makes it worse.

[DC-05/N] Agent Telaroth
Imperial Intelligence Service

“A few days would get you a solid maybe, but an undetermined amount of time is a little unreasonable, don't you think?” I remarked, raising an eyeridge at Telricktus, who eyed me warily. “What's this for anyway?”

“To track where the stolen goods are going, and you're basically the perfect candidate for that. Besides, the other Deep Cover Agents are out on other missions,” Telricktus replied, flicking his tail slightly, “The nanites are the perfect honeypot.”

I nodded, making eye contact and I leaned in till our snouts almost touched, my breath hot on his nose, “Sure, but if I sit in that barrel for a year and nothing happens, I’m coming back here and taking your face off you.”

Telricktus took a sharp intake of breath before pushing me gently away, “I-I doubt it’ll take that long. You have a week to get ready. I’ll be there to introduce you to your station-bound partner.”

“It better not be that scientist again, he kept wanting to stick probes in me,” I replied with a snort, flicking my tail, letting it go rubbery for a second so that it smacked overly loudly against the floor, making Telricktus start a little. I grinned, he glared at me.

Telricktus straightened his uniform with an annoyed snort and shook his head, “No, I got the complaints about them. It’s someone else this time that’s less of an idiot.”

“Great. I’ll go and read the brief, then,” I replied, walking out and leaving blue gooey footprints on the white tiled floor.

“Take your bloody nanites with you!” Telricktus roared and I couldn’t help but giggle as I recalled the goo. Ah yes, it’s nice having an entire floor devoted to the Division, it lets me mess with Telricktus *all the time*.

I ended up back in my little apartment and flicked through the mission brief while having a nice cup of tea. Seemed like we were indeed being stolen from, but not only were these thieves becoming more brazen, they were also becoming more particular about what they took – a lot of residual readings were found in areas where nothing was taken...where nothing interesting was kept, while places like laboratories and such had a high count of missing items. These people know what they want...or rather, they learnt where to look to get what they want. Mainframes, weapons, sometimes even ship engines. No wonder Telricktus was worried.

Either way, I got my affairs in order, as usual, then packed up and made my way to the station as ordered. Telricktus never really provided any details on what container I was to sit in, but he did at least let me ride my way over as a person rather than as cargo.

Snr Captain Tano’rath
Cmdr, DES Defiant

I spent most of my week clearing as much of the overdue paperwork that I had to get done as possible. If anything, it was a bit of a relief to be able to spend time sitting at the console rather than running around fighting battles or putting fires out. This, however, was still spoilt by the uncertainty hovering above me as the mission loomed closer.

Either way, I packed my bags and the ship dropped me off at the station on the way to the shipyard for the refit. Strangely enough, Telricktus had me meet him a few lightyears short of the station itself. He stood there, cool as ever as I walked aboard and nodded to me, only to have Telaroth walk out of one of the cabins, shove Telricktus aside and give me a big hug.

“Really, you chose not to tell me?” I remarked to Telricktus as I couldn’t help but hug the nanite agent back, “After so long?”

“The rules are what they are, Captain,” Telricktus replied, sighing, “I’ll admit that I wanted to, though.”

“But you didn’t because you’re an asshole.” Telaroth interjected as he finally let me go with a grin. He even gave me a quick salute, “Captain. It’s been too long.”

I returned the salute with a nod. “It’s been a while, so what, where’s the package?”

“He’s the package,” Telricktus replied, pointing at the Agent then at an oil barrel sitting at the back of the shuttle, “He’s going to hide in that barrel and let himself get stolen, gather some intel, then call home.”

I couldn’t help but laugh, “Fuck me, thank fuck you didn’t ask me be the bait! So, what, I put him in a storeroom and wait? You know that’s never going to happen, right?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that, he knows,” Telaroth quipped with his signature smirk, “I made sure of that.”

“No, I want him in the lab. This place has had more...transgressions than any other because they’re on the cutting edge and I believe the nanite technology will be irresistible-“ Telricktus started to ramble but got cut off, first by me pointing to the airlock, having heard the shuttle complete the docking sequence, and then by Telaroth...

[DC-05/N] Agent Telaroth
Imperial Intelligence Service

Tano’rath tried and failed to get us to walk to the airlock as I decided that having a laugh was more important.

“Oooo! He’s going for a promotion!” I exclaimed, clapping my hands... which I turned into pom-poms and did a little dance to go along with it. I even made up some confetti and threw it in Telricktus’ face. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Tano’rath turn away to hide a grin. After all, since I’m being stuffed into a barrel for this operation, I’d might as well have my fun while I can, “I’ll cheer for you!”

Telricktus rolled his eyes, as usual, before glaring at me, despite knowing full well that I don’t give a rat’s arse about what he thinks of what I do. Tano’rath stood off to one side, having been trying to get us to get a move on towards the airlock earlier...but he had given up and was too busy trying not to laugh. Telricktus, however, was having none of it. “For fuck’s sake, Telaroth, this is serious!”

Tano’rath finally stopped vibrating long enough to look over at Telricktus and remark in between giggles, “I don’t envy your job, Telricktus, but I get the point.”

Telricktus, being Telricktus, proceeded to straighten out his ruffled uniform and wits before continuing his briefing. “Thank you, Captain. Now, it is our theory that they have some way of watching us, be it through the same technology or by tapping into our data streams, so your assignment will be to ‘guard’ the barrel as a high value asset. Of course, you have to make it...authentic, but letting things slip here and there is expected, if you know what I mean.”

I picked that moment to pluck an errant bit of confetti off Telricktus’ snout, earning myself another glare. Tano’rath kept a straight face this time, but the twinkle in his eyes betrayed enough.

“So make some noise but not too much. Got it.” Tano’rath replied with a shrug, still trying not to laugh, “Nothing special, but with regard to your Agent, does he get to...get out at all?”

Obviously, this is one of the pain points of this mission. None of us Deep Cover Agents like this kind of thing and I couldn't help but let some of my irritation leak into my tone as I growled lowly, "No, I don't, in case they strike in the middle of the night, I'll get to send texts to you and that's about it. Not the most interesting of missions."

"I suppose it'll get interesting once you get abducted," Tano'rath replied with a snort. I don't get how he's always so casual about anything dangerous at all, but then again, it must be a Fleet Officer thing, "Don't worry, I'll come save you again."

I smirked at him and held eye contact as I leaned in closer than comfort, "At this rate, you'd might as well marry me with how many times you've come and pulled me out of shit! Perhaps I should ask them to have you transferred to our Fleet..."

Of course, this is a classic thing, everyone's done it at some point or other and it even works on Telricktus, but as I found out, no, not on Captain Tano'rath Daranakaan. I felt him grab the collar of my shirt and drag me the rest of the way till our snouts almost touched with a snarl, "That ain't gonna happen and you know that!"

I couldn't help but grin at him before gesturing at Telricktus, "That's why I always ask for you! You've got spunk! Unlike mister stick-up-arse here."

"Look, I'm working here, so I can't be that honest around my colleagues," he replied, letting a slight smirk cross his snout for a split second before it was gone, "Either way, I'd say you best enjoy your next few hours before we start, because after that, you're going to be a puddle for a good long while."

He let me go and I straightened back up, sighing, "yeah, I know that, but that is the nature of what I do. Shall we have lunch?"

"We're early enough to get away with it," Telricktus chimed in.

"Sure, you can come too," I replied, feigning a casual tone, but well, Tano'rath can read me like a book, he probably knows.

The Captain, however, did look a little sorry for Telricktus and nodded, "Oh, you know what, give him a break, let him come."

I simply nodded as he walked away. Lunch wasn't anything too special, but it was tasty enough. Most of the rest of the time was spent on small talk before we finally disembarked with after I jumped into the barrel at the last minute and melting into goo.

Snr Captain Tano'rath
Cmdr, DES Defiant

I ended up being chief of the security contingent in charge of the barrel which was marked as containing a 'next-generation nanite solvent', what it was supposed to dissolve eluded me, but whatever. As long as it worked, right?

I got a few messages from Telaroth now and then, making small talk every so often. He was obviously bored out of his mind and I didn't blame him. The barrel was sitting in a corner of the lab and not actually being used for anything. It sat and it sat. Hours became days, days became weeks and weeks became months. I had been waffling about on the station, talking to people, dropping hints

about the barrel of high-tech solvent every now and then, but nothing happened...until one day, the texts from Telaroth stopped and I walked into the lab to find the barrel gone. In its place was the same wormhole signature that was consistent with the other missing items. He's been taken.

I was reassigned to my ship a few days later and returned to patrol duty pending further orders. The good news, at least, was that we had had a major refit done rather than a minor one, so the ship was running far better than it used to. However, I couldn't help but worry now and then about my secret agent friend who was in the middle of goodness-knows-where now. Then again, though, that's his job.