

# Salvage

*By Tanorath-drgn*

**Snr Captain Tano'rath**

**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

“You know, when Hector asked if I wanted something exciting for this duty rotation, I really should’ve said no,” I remarked as I flicked through the mission briefing with Talorath while the ship cruised to our destination, “salvage missions never end well.”

“Why are the I.I.S. interested anyway? Says here that the station has been at least partly stripped,” Talorath replied as he idly flicked through the same document on a tablet, “the search teams have reported ready, by the way. They’re being briefed right now.”

“Don’t know, they never say. Probably think the Alliance left something behind on that hunk of junk,” I replied as I flicked my tail, “Very good. Is Quaren on Edge’s team?”

Talorath rolled his eyes, “Most of the time there’s nothing to find, only traps at worst. And yes, Quaren is with the engineering team, albeit as a last-minute addition. This should close out part of his evaluation, shouldn’t it?”

I shrugged, “It’s the few times they find something that they care about, arguably. They’re even sending a ship this time, which is more than unusual. As for Quaren, yeah, that’ll get him his away mission assessment, or one of them anyway, depending on what happens.”

“Yeah, it should cover more if it goes hot,” Talorath replied as he glanced over, “Did you read the briefing notes as well?”

I raised an eyeridge and nodded, “Yeah. They’re massing ships and I bet so are we. Not the best of times to be snooping around disputed territory, hey.”

“Well, it’s technically ours. Not our fault they ceded it and changed their minds a month later,” Talorath replied with a snort as he picked a bit of dirt out of one of his claws, “but at least it means help will be close at hand.”

“Yeah, you can’t just call a takeback on a treaty that you signed,” I replied with another sigh as I sank back into my chair, “either way, hope it won’t come to that. The I.I.S. ship should be meeting us there. Coming in from another mission apparently.”

“At least that means that spook Telricktus will be on his own ship instead of snooping around ours,” Talorath remarked with a snort, not even trying to hide his disdain, “I still don’t know how you manage to be friends with him.”

“Friends might be a stretch. I tolerate him,” I replied with a slight chuckle, “Just be grateful that he’s on our side because he’s good at what he does.”

“You know, it still annoys me that he let us be replaced by clones for a month,” Talorath replied as he looked over, “I really don’t know how you get over these things that easily.”

“I try not to dwell on things too much. Everyone is just trying to do their jobs or fight their fight, even the Alliance. No point getting your tail all knotty about it,” As I spoke, I looked at him, made eye contact and giggled, “Besides, that’s why I get to sit in the big boy chair and you don’t.”

Talorath rolled his eyes at my cheap shot, as expected, but I did get a few chuckles from the other officers. It’ll be a while before we arrive anyway and while Talorath would monitor things on the ship, I would be in the hot seat in the operations room later on to run the mission. I had the other departments check in as we got closer and the away teams all received their information packages, including maps, target areas and a general list of what to look for. I was told that additional information will be provided by the I.I.S. upon arrival. It was probably their way of trying to worm into the briefing, but well, it is Fleet procedure to complete as much as possible in-transit to avoid wasting time. Best they’ll get is a mini secondary briefing and they’ll have to be happy with that.

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### **Cadet (Senior) Quaren I.D.A.F. Command Training Program**

Somehow, I was not surprised at all when I was reassigned to the Defiant after the fiasco aboard the Tremos. I thought it was because they wanted to put me somewhere familiar for my final assessment, but Tano’rath just straight up told me that he had requested that I be posted back here. Something about doing things properly.

After what had previously transpired, I don’t blame him, really. The hands-on nature of his teaching had put me ahead of a few others in my cohort and it had shown, so no real complaints on my part.

Either way, I was in the shower when Edge rang the doorbell to my quarters, so he proceeded to ring it fifteen times while I fumbled around with a towel, stumbled out still sopping wet and opened the door to find the Synth about to ring the bell a sixteenth time. He looked me over a few times and

rolled his digital eyes, “Why is it that every time I come looking for you, you’re in the toilet, Quaren?”

“I...don’t know...?” I replied as I couldn’t help but frown. There weren’t any alerts out and the ship was still cruising, “did something come up?”

“Yeah, I forgot to add you to the mission,” Edge replied slightly sheepishly, “Uh finish your shower, grab your kit and I’ll brief you. I’ll be here when you’re ready.”

I nodded, “I’ll be quick.”

Edge nodded and I found myself shutting the door and scuttling back into the shower, finishing up and then struggling into my armour and whatnot. I had to clip on a special camera that would record audio and video for my evaluation on top of the usual stuff too and I nearly forgot it before I walked out again. Edge beckoned for me to follow him as he handed me a tablet with a map on it.

...that’s also a first, I didn’t know Synths could forget things.

Otherwise, Edge was back to his usual self, having booked a small meeting room for my briefing and he sat me down, blew the map on the tablet up on-screen and settled down in his seat. “We’re being garbage-pickers. Picking over what’s left of that shitheap you see up there. Almost guaranteed to be booby trapped to hell and back because they always are, else they would’ve properly scuttled it or taken it home. Someone fucked their timing up.”

“Is there anything specific that we’re looking for?” I replied as I sat down, “it doesn’t look like an awfully important station.”

“Don’t know, briefing doesn’t say,” Edge replied with a snort, rolling his digital eyes, “Captain says that the Intelligence Service is involved, so I’m sure they’ll tell us when they get here, but the briefing does call for full engineering support.”

I raised an eyeridge as Edge slid his tablet over for me to look over the document, “That’s...a lot of comms hardware for an outpost.”

“I’m thinking they want the buffers to pick over,” Edge replied as he zoomed in on the grainy photo, making it look even worse. “You know, I don’t know how they always find the shittiest cameras in the universe for these fucking photos, but you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I’ve not seen a good photo in these briefings ever,” I replied with a chuckle, “Could this be why they’re making such a fuss about the area?”

“This and the titanium deposits we found a few months ago” Edge replied as he rolled his eyes again, “It’s not our sides’ fault their sensor tech is shit.”

I snorted as we went over the rest of the briefing, even going through the maps and such that were included. I was given the rough plan and reminded to keep an eye out for traps and the like. In a perfect universe, the station would be handed over clean, but well, people have died for that assumption and I didn’t want to die that day.

Eventually, Edge had me go and check my equipment before meeting him and the rest of our little team as the ship cruised to the staging area.

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**Snr Captain Tano’rath**  
**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

“Yup the I.I.S. ship is just coming into sensor range,” Talorath remarked as he poked at his station, “late, as usual.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle, “No, we’re actually early. Anyway, they’re going to want to do the briefing in person on their ship and that’s not happening. Telricktus will come here.”

“Yeah, they just asked us to send everyone over,” Talorath replied with a snort, “how do you propose we change their minds, sir?”

“You mean Telricktus? I outrank him. It’s an order, not a request.” I replied as I found a slight smirk creeping onto my snout, “besides, we have a mass driver and he doesn’t.”

Talorath matched my smirk and started tapping away on his terminal, “I’m sure he’ll complain about it.”

“Better this than whatever rule I broke last week,” I replied with a snort as I leaned back in my chair, “anyway, I think we can run our part of it from here. The I.I.S. can do whatever the fuck they’re doing from their ship. They always leave someone to coordinate anyway.”

Talorath nodded as we finished up and I handed over to Arktak, who was on ops this month and headed down to join the secondary briefing with the troops. Telricktus had already sent me a message directly, which doubtlessly was a complaint about what I had just done, but I checked it just in case.

It was a complaint about what I had just done.

Either way, we all met in the hangar bay as the four retrieval teams plus the I.I.S. tag-alongs consisted of way too many people for the conference room. There, next to his shuttle, stood Telricktus in his brand-new looking combat armour. He was already handing out tablets and tossed one to me when I motioned for him to do it. Just as I expected him to start talking, a familiar figure sauntered out of the shuttle – Telaroth.

The Deep Cover agent was also clad in armour and gave me a grin and a wave, cutting Telricktus off from starting the briefing to shake my hand and tell me that he was on a 'rest' rotation and so got to go on a regular mission.

Telricktus, being Telricktus, glared at the both of us before clearing his throat and starting his half of the briefing.

I had spoken with Edge when I could steal a few minutes and our best guess turned out to be right – this used to be a relay station. However, the I.I.S. had only just found out that Alliance Intelligence had made pretty heavy use of this site too, which meant whatever comms buffers we could grab had the potential to be extremely valuable.

Explains the sudden backflip on their end regarding the cessation of the station. A passing thought had me muse that it didn't matter anymore, but then I remembered the massing ships on either side of the line.

It only stops mattering once we have the buffers in hand and are on our way.

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**Cadet (Senior) Quaren**  
**I.D.A.F. Command Training Program**

I can see why Tano'rath doesn't like Telricktus. The latter has a stick up his arse the size of a tree and it's only getting bigger. The Deep Cover Agent, though, is a nice guy. We met on one of my first missions and he had quietly kept an eye on me till he had to go.

The briefing went the way it did, with a lot of repetition from the original, though Tano'rath got impatient and made the Lieutenant go over the fresh information first, then released the Fleet personnel to complete our preparations while the I.I.S. troops got to hear the rest of it. While Tano'rath technically has to stay for the whole thing, he didn't bother and went for his tea break instead. I don't blame him, really. You can hardly run off to have a sandwich once things are already underway.

Preparations went pretty well, aside from a random salvage vessel turning up and trying to insist that they had scrap rights to the station. Word came down from the bridge about this and while Telricktus tried to suggest that we fire on them, Tano'rath outright told him to shut up while he handled it. Telricktus didn't seem happy about the perspective witnesses seeing the two ships, but Tano'rath remarked that we could just be on a routine security check. Besides, the station legally belongs to us, so we have priority for salvage rights as the security forces.

Agent Telaroth seemed content to watch the two officers argue while giggling quietly to himself since it wasn't his problem. Turns out he's staying on the ship as the liaison instead of Telricktus and most people seemed to prefer that, despite him being an Agent.

We ended up simply powering up our weaponry and the salvagers suddenly decided that the station was not worth it anymore. They were sent on their way in relatively short order and told to come back next week when we'd be long gone. They seemed content enough to settle for the scraps and left. The fact that their tiny ship was facing down two cruiser class warships probably helped.

Either way, it's a well-known fact that comms buffers hold a lot of residual data since these things are very rarely flushed and when they are, it's never done properly because it takes too long. Edge spent the extra time showing the various teams what to look for. While we usually don't bother with anything that's too badly damaged, Telricktus still insisted that we take everything that wasn't completely slagged.

I suppose they have their ways of getting information out of the computers too. I've heard the rumours.

Tano'rath came past at some point to clap me on the shoulder and wish me well. He, as always, seemed awfully casual about the entire operation, but I've learnt that it's just how he deals with it. It's almost painfully obvious that he's scoping me out for his crew, but I suppose I can't really complain. He does know what he's doing...mostly.

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**Snr Captain Tano'rath**  
**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

I suspect Quaren thinks he's going to land a place on this crew post-graduation. He is not.

Fleet regulations forbid a mentor from taking on their student for at least three months as a sort of cooling-off period. I wouldn't mind having him on roster, he's smart, but the lack of experience will get him killed. Enthusiasm is good and all, but it'll also cost you a limb in some cases.

Before I could muse more, though, the teams had to start loading up as we were drawing near and I was pulled away with Telaroth to run the mission as Talorath and Arktak kept an eye out for any unwelcome surprises.

It was almost surprising that Telaroth himself wasn't going down with the teams, but I suppose even nanite agents get sick of dealing with risk too. At this point, though, nobody was complaining – the crew doesn't like Telricktus and Telaroth has come aboard a few times, so they at least know him to be amicable.

Either way, we made our way to the operations room once Telricktus had returned to the ship. Of course, if this was a Fleet operation, we would have an active encrypted comms link to co-ordinate things, but because the I.I.S. is always paranoid, Telaroth had his own comms link with a tablet, all done with their own special security protocol. I couldn't even have it mirrored on the comms screen, it's explicitly disallowed for them to connect to their intranet, so we'll be doing this the old-fashioned way.

The ops room is almost a mini bridge in its own right, with stations for engineering, security and spare spots for the ground forces, I.I.S. and so on. It's well lit, of course, with a big screen up front showing mission parameters and will have helmet cam feeds later. Because this part of the ship had taken a hit rather recently, everything was new, which meant that the minifridge was stocked with drinks and snacks for once.

I grabbed a bottle of cold tea before taking my spot in the command chair. As I booted up the terminal, Telaroth strolled over with the tablet and leaned on the back rest, "How long do you think this'll take?"

"Longer than whatever time we have," I replied with a snort as I checked my sidearm, "It always happens."

“Expecting trouble?” Telaroth added as he raised an eyeridge at me, tapping away at his tablet before he produced a holder out of nowhere and clamped it to one of my armrests, “I’ve heard a bit of chatter about tensions, but half the time nothing comes of it.”

“I thought you’d know more than me,” I replied as I glanced over, still waiting for the terminal to load my admittedly numerous browser tabs, “Isn’t that your job?”

“No, that’s for IA agents,” Telaroth replied with a chuckle, “That was my old job. Information Acquisition is boring anyway, most of the time you just eavesdrop on people through walls or steal computers.”

“No fucking?” I replied with a snort as the other officers finished setting up and I had their statuses go green on my screen, “Ah, the away teams are just about ready.”

“No fucking. Even less romance” Telaroth added with a flick of his tail as he poked at his tablet, “Yup our people are settling in with yours, boarding shuttles now.”

Once everyone checked in, I nodded. “Well, let’s get this done, then. Tensions are never good news and they’re massing ships. Could blow up now, next month or never, who knows.”

“Well, let’s hope for the last one,” Telaroth replied as he eyed me slightly, “Wouldn’t be much of a rest rotation if I get shot up.”

“It’s not as if you get injured, you fuckin knob,” I added with a snort, flicking my tail as I sent confirmation to the team leaders, “Shuttles launched, committed to mission.”

“Our units are checking in, I have their cams here,” Telaroth replied as he shifted the tablet mount so that I could see. As he spoke, our own feeds came live, showing the various teams in their shuttles, “And no, it doesn’t hurt me, but it’s still inconvenient. I do not like having more holes than usual.”

I rolled my eyes as the teams on-screen completed their final checks enroute and the sensor feed from the ship showed the shuttles streaking towards the abandoned station with the fighter escort. The ship remained at yellow alert, with weapons primed and shields up in case anything went wrong.

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**Cadet (Senior) Quaren**  
**I.D.A.F. Command Training Program**



“Alright, we’re headed to one of the data storage nodes, close to the mainframe in the heart of the station,” Edge remarked as he had the tablet blow up the map as a hologram so that we could all see, “Check for traps, grab and go. Don’t bother inspecting for condition, we can sort it later. Captain doesn’t want us lingering any longer than necessary.”

In the back, the blue-scaled I.I.S. trooper assigned to us nodded along. She hadn’t spoken much, only shook our hands and told us that her name was Leyi. She hadn’t been rude or anything, but was busy fiddling with her own tablet until now. She raised an eyeridge when Edge mentioned the desire for speed. Edge being Edge noticed straight away and nodded to her, motioning for her to ask her question.

“I can assist in looking for traps,” She remarked as she got up, her voice more than a bit rough and as she came a little closer, I noticed the scar on her snout, running across it and down the left side, “The Lieutenant didn’t mention it, but we’ve been made aware that the Alliance is making a move. Your captain is wise not to linger, but beware of traps on the route. Even empty hallways can be deadly. Especially you, Cadet.”

I could feel myself shiver a little as she made eye contact with me, but then she chuckled and sat back down as I nodded. Edge snorted, but you could feel the tension in the shuttle go up a notch. Explains why the officers were so worried...

She flashed me a smile anyway and if anything, it made it worse.

It didn’t take long for us to reach the station and thankfully, the docking ring on our entry point was still functional. The pilot was able to power it up with the shuttle and lock us in safely. The airlock would need to be manually jacked open, but this was still less work.

The captain and the operations team did mention the heightening tension in passing, but they clearly didn’t want to make us rush, so they didn’t elaborate too much on it. Instead, our mission maps updated to show the priority rooms highlighted in red, with our storage node being one of them. A few of the backup rooms adjacent were instead highlighted in green and marked by Tano’rath as ‘bonus’.

Leyi, who had her own map, because the I.I.S. always had to be special, frowned when she saw the label on mine, “Bonus? Does he mean it’s the secondary target? That’s what it’s marked as on mine.”

“Yeah,” Edge replied as he glanced over, “so it’s the bonus points.”

“Your captain is weird,” She replied with a slight giggle that she tried so very hard to hide, “isn’t that considered unprofessional in the Fleet?”

Edge himself giggled, “Leyi, we’re taking about the captain who drifted his starship to toss an exhaust pod full of explosives at a battlecruiser. I don’t think he cares.”

“Oh, that was him,” Leyi replied with a slight grin, “even we’ve heard of that. No wonder Agent DC-05 likes working with him, he’s crazy.”

“Oh, that’s barely the surface,” Edge replied, matching her grin, “If you’re still here for a bit after this, I’ll tell you a few of the stories, but for now, we’ve got a job to do.”

Leyi nodded as we headed to the airlock, standing clear as Edge pried the manual override panel off and pumped the hydraulics to get the door open.

While the environmental systems were running on the station, we were all still in spacesuits, since the easiest trap is to vent the atmosphere in the station once people walked in. They were set to take air in from outside and filter it, but if things went bad, the valves would still shut and save our lives.

Once the doors were open, we flicked our torches on and stepped into the station, with scanners sweeping for traps and Leyi taking point with Edge, looking around and sweeping the dusty corridor for tripwires and the like...

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**Snr Captain Tano’rath**  
**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

As we watched the teams progress and made small talk in between the mission updates, a communique came in from High Command advising that the First and Second Fleets were to be placed on stand-to. The Third fleet was busy patrolling a different sector, but they were advised to be ready to move. Not much was given in the way of explanation, but we all knew what was going on.

Orders were coming down for patrols to be reinforced and such. Doubtlessly, they were already shuffling ships around in the background, but those orders go direct to the individual vessels.

Long range sensors raised an alarm when several Alliance vessels were detected not too far away, but they were still on their side of the line, so there was nothing to do. I still had Talorath report it back to Command just in case. Hector sent a pretty short reply amounting to ‘I know’ and told us to work quickly.

The reports from the teams were still trickling in as we monitored the comms chatter. Most of them had already entered the station with the exception of one team that was having trouble with their airlock. We gave them a different docking point to use that didn't look damaged, but they managed to get the airlock open before the message was sent.

Good progress was being made with most teams slowly making their way down the various corridors, marking their route with spray paint as they went along. A surprisingly small number of traps had been found and as the footage continued to stream, it became clear that the station had been vacated in a massive hurry. Some desks still had mouldy food on them, while things had been left all over the floor, some of the living quarters still had personal effects and so on. Come to think about it, a quick check of the logs from the treaty negotiation, which Telaroth had produced out of nowhere, revealed that this system had been tacked on as a last-minute compromise. They probably barely had time to get out, let alone set the station to explode when we turned up.

At least that meant that progress was good and I reminded the teams to paint the floor to mark which sides they were walking on and such, to avoid any unwelcome surprises on the return trip.

The station was a bit of a maze, with the layout being designed deliberately to confuse interlopers, but the teams got to the primary objectives quickly enough and began work.

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**Cadet (Senior) Quaren**  
**I.D.A.F. Command Training Program**

Dust and mess, that's what this place was. Random everyday items were strewn everywhere. A tablet here, notebook there, sometimes the odd piece of cutlery. It had very obviously been vacated in a hurry. Tablets and computers were left idle, some of which we took with us. The gravity plating was intermittent and mostly didn't work. Edge remarked that it was probably petty sabotage, but the magnetic boots that we all had got us by anyway.

There had been a few tripwires and pressure plate traps, but Edge, with his advanced sensors and Leyi with her experience quite quickly disarmed the traps and made them safe. They were marked too, of course, for future reference.

Eventually, we got to our objective. Unfortunately, the door was jammed shut and when Leyi tried to open it, it didn't move. As she panted into her suit, she pointed Edge to the door, "Mind opening this jar of pickles for me, Edge?"

Edge glanced at her and nodded before the Synth grabbed the double doors and shoved them open like they were made of paper. Leyi welded them open with her sidearm before we entered.

The room was surprisingly clean, but given that this just housed storage drives and auxiliary computers, it was fair to assume that nobody really passed through here unless there was work to be done. There were server racks in neat rows, with cabling still tied up in bundles dangling next to each rack, having been cut by the previous owners. They usually rip all the cabling out when they vacate to make life difficult for us, but again, they probably didn't have time for that.

Edge started pointing people to the various drive bays and took me with him to the final one. As people began scanning for traps and the like, I reached for my scanner only to have Edge shake his head. "No, I can see that it's rigged. Explosive charge tripped by the bay door latch. It'll take your fingers or hand."

As he spoke, there were several other whispers and people grabbed tools and started inspecting various points on their targets. Seems like they did have time after all. "Right, so what do we do?"

"I can disarm it, but it'll take time." Edge replied as he peered at the latch, grabbed a small screwdriver out of his tool belt, "You might want to stand aside in case it goes off."

I nodded and scuttled a good distance away, watching the Synth coax a few wires out of the enclosure. He frowned as he peered at them and pulled his multimeter out to check the four cables before he grabbed two, snipped them then popped the enclosure open.

Half expecting things to explode, I waited a moment before walking over only to have him stop me as he coaxed a foil packet out of the enclosure itself, unscrewed the latch and pulled everything out. I saw a simple switch connected to the latch, a small battery pack and the foil pack of explosives. Very simple setup and clearly still had charge.

Edge removed the battery, whose wires he had already cut, sprayed it with a liberal amount of orange paint and then tossed it out the door. Again, I expected an explosion, but all I heard was it clattering to the floor outside. It was then that he beckoned me back over.

The drive bay sat open with a pair of SSDs sitting there. The bay itself was without power, of course and the processing unit sat dormant. Edge had me check for more traps before we yanked them out and tossed them into my satchel.

As people finished up, the other teams went to the adjoining rooms to collect the bonus drives. Those weren't trapped somehow, but given how inconsistent the trap placement was, I wasn't surprised at all. As the other teams called out that they were finishing up too, we began our walk back to the shuttle, careful to follow our own markings on the floor.

A stack of bright orange disarmed traps sat by the server room doors. Edge grabbed one or two to examine later and left the rest for the cleanup crew. The bright orange paint should be warning enough anyway.

We called in that we were returning, only to find that we were the last team to do so – we had to deal with the most traps, apparently. They urged us to hurry as we made our way down the corridors and back to the shuttle...

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**Snr Captain Tano'rath**  
**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

Things were going pretty smoothly, actually. There had been some delays with traps being found and whatnot, but nobody had been injured, other than someone bruising their snout when they tripped over a bit of plating. Otherwise, it was pretty textbook.

I could've done without the stream of updates about escalating tensions, but it was better to know than to not. Ships were massing. We had our own reinforcements waiting just one system away as the Alliance massed their ships also one system away.

As the teams rounded what must've been the collective last corner, a priority one transmission came in from High Command. No prizes for guessing what that was about.

I had the transmission put up on the screen, alongside the helmet cams and the video came on to show Admiral Hector, who looked like he was already spoiling for a fight, with his wings twitching and his eyes staring holes into the camera. He had his laptop open and was clearly reading off a script too. "As of two hours ago, Alliance ships began massing on our borders, as most of you might have heard. We have responded in kind while negotiation was attempted. That has now failed."

He paused to sigh and rub his forehead, "Expect a formal declaration of war within an hour. First and Second fleets are to prepare to repel assaults. Third fleet to move to support. All leave is now suspended till further notice. Any missions ongoing in the border areas must be wrapped up now, regardless of completion status and all vessels to return to your posts. Further instructions to come shortly."

With that, the transmission cut out and moments later, Hector sent me a message telling me to pull the teams out and get out.

Thankfully, the shuttles were mostly already disengaging from the station and coming about. The escorts were already ready and waiting, so there was this little glimmer of hope that it would still work out. However, as the group of smaller craft streaked back to the ship, the red alert klaxon went off.

Talorath's voice blared over the speakers as I got up. "General quarters, Captain to the bridge! Three Alliance signatures inbound!"

I glanced over at Telaroth as I got up and headed to the door, "Can you finish this up? Get em home safe, yea?"

The Agent nodded as I turned and jogged out, running past various other crewmembers as I made my way to the stairs to get to the bridge – the lift is going to be too slow at this point. It always is...

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**Cadet (Senior) Quaren  
I.D.A.F. Command Training Program**

I could hear the pilot swearing as the news came through and he slammed the throttle to full as the shuttle lurched forward, nearly making me drop my comms unit as I read the news. Edge was busy snout-clawing while Leyi rolled her eyes, saying something about this being the most unsurprising result.

"They're saying that there are Alliance ships inbound," Edge remarked, rubbing his visor, "good chance they'll get here just as we're on final approach."

"They're moving the ship closer to us, I can see the engines firing up," The pilot hollered over as we continued accelerating, "It'll be close, but we might make it."

"What about the I.I.S. ship? Weren't they closer?" Edge shouted over as he tapped away on his tablet.

I heard a laugh from the cockpit, "Fuckin cowards already jumped to FTL, we're on our own!"

"What?!" Leyi snarled, looking over, "but we're still here!"

"Welcome to the Fleet, Leyi," Edge replied, snorting, "Your commander has left you in our hands, be it for better or for worse."

Leyi glared at Edge for a moment before she sighed, “Your captain better be as good as they say he is because mine damn well isn’t.”

“Hold on!” The pilot hollered as an alarm went off, “We’ve got incoming!”

I felt the shuttle shake and protest as the pilot took evasive action. The screens showed the external sensor feed – three Alliance frigates had dropped out of FTL and already started firing on our little group. Missiles streaked out and so did energy bolts, all bound for our tiny group of fighters and runabouts. While these things are far more agile than they look, the pilot was already pushing it and the shields can’t really take that much of a beating.

I could hear the pilot swearing as we got thrown around, almost like being in a washing machine as we rolled, swerved and ducked, before the external sensors lit up with a proximity warning. The next thing I knew, the entire view was blocked by the flank of the Defiant.

“Ah, he did a micro-jump,” Edge remarked, as we dived into the waiting hangar bay, “I see he’s in a mood to gamble today.”

“What the fuck? That was danger close!” Leyi roared, gesturing at the screen, “He could’ve hit us!”

“You asked if he’s as good as we say he is. Here’s your answer.” Edge replied with a smirk as we set down. I could feel the ship shuddering and shaking as they took the hits for us and doubtlessly returned fire. “Now, you’re all with me. Back to engineering, I have a job to do.”

With that, we all disembarked, running to our various posts as the hangar doors slammed shut behind us.

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**Snr Captain Tano’rath**  
**Cmdr, DES Defiant**

I couldn’t help but breathe a sigh of relief as the last of the shuttles and fighters reported in. Most of them were fine, but the little vessels had all taken a beating. I had the hangar doors shut as quickly as possible as we fired upon the Alliance ships, with our shields barely holding.

If it was just the lone one, I would've engaged, but with reinforcements still way too far off, the odds were too steep.

"Slag the station, fire full spread, full yield." I snapped as the ship shuddered once again and my terminal threw up a low shield warning, "Prime the drive, we're getting outta here after that."

Telarothe, who had finished up downstairs was leaning against my chair and watching, "Ah, you don't want them to know what we took. I was about to suggest that."

As the energy beams and missiles hit the station, blowing it to smithereens, I nodded, "That was Telricktus' job, but he fucking ran away."

"He probably got ordered to leave. The ship has too much classified tech on it to lose," Telarothe replied with a snort, flicking his tail as my ship shuddered again, "still doesn't look good on him, though."

"They're already calling him a coward on the internal chats," I remarked with a snort, "anyway, lets get the fuck outta here. Intercept course for the reinforcements and join them."

The drive whined and engaged as we swerved around, barely making it out with the shields still up.

The border dispute sparked a number of skirmishes, of course. We ended up rejoining our detachment and held the system against several waves of Alliance vessels. The outcome was that we actually took more territory when the Alliance offensive lost steam, leaving them smarting when we handed them the new ceasefire agreement.

The SSD's that were retrieved were handed over to the I.I.S. once we had a break in the fighting and thankfully, they did yield some results. I wasn't told what they got out of it, but the increased flow of intel was telling enough. The I.I.S. troops stayed as part of our complement till they got a chance to be transferred off the ship. Nobody really complained since they turned out to be pretty amicable, but it's still nicer to have no I.I.S. presence around.

Telricktus sent me an apology for leaving that day. I sent him a few screenshots of the crew's opinions of him and he stopped talking to me for a month. He also didn't seem to like the fact this one of his strike troops, Leyi, filed for a transfer to my command and I snatched her before he could quash the request. That's probably why the radio silence was for a month instead of the usual fortnight. Doesn't matter. She's good at what she does and it's not my fault he made himself look like a coward!