

The Devastation of Yridia

VT-49 Retribution

Deep Space

Yridia System

The crew of the *Retribution* sat quietly monitoring the Yridia System as it had, diligently, since the beginning of the war against the Collective. The vessel had gone undetected, aided by the minimal military presence left in Tarentum dominated territory. Most of the Clan's forces had left to combat the Collective above Nancora. The Tarentae leadership, like all the other Clans, had deemed an offensive on the Collective was the best course of action with the forces of the Iron Throne withdrawn to the Arx System.

Coded messages had slowly trickled back to the *Retribution* that the war was over. The Collective's unified command had been destroyed and the combined forces had been scattered to the wind. The Tarentum fleets would be returning soon and the mission to monitor all Clan's home activity would be withdrawn. The crew was in high spirits, knowing the war had been won and Clan Odan-Urr had stood triumphant over Nancora.

Commander Mauro Wynter stood on the bridge, preparing the final dispatches and charting safe passage for the vessels exit and the follow-on scout ships that would sure to relieve her. Major Silvia Tanos looked over from her console and signaled Mauro. "Sir, we have a massive force entering the system near Yridia II. On screen now."

The display registered a view of the planet's high orbit. A single Imperial-II class Star Destroyer and several escort vessels came into view; heavy cruisers and a flotilla of corvettes and destroyers. The wedge-shaped craft began discharging squadrons of small craft. "Registering seventy TIE bombers launching towards the surface with escorts. The Imp is bombarding planet-side...this fleet doesn't belong to any Clan within our database." Tanos reported, eyes wide. "Collective?"

Wynter studied the display intently. "Send word of this to Kiast. And the Collective had a sizable fleet but not of those platforms...that's Iron Throne...they sent a punitive expedition *here?*" Before Major Tanos could answer another display came to life. "Sir, Tarentum fleet inbound. Either Tarentum was following this force or..." Commander Wynter didn't need to hear the theory, cutting her off he finished the sentence, "Or the Iron Throne baited them."

The ISD-II *Magnus Kaerner*, flagship of Clan Tarentum, began firing on her twin as soon as she entered range. She was soon ringed by two VSDs and an ever increasing fleet of cruisers and corvettes. A lone escort carrier, the *Anubis* began hemorrhaging interceptor craft. The Tarentum fleet was giving a good showing of itself, with the odds on its side. Her six corvettes and four heavy cruisers taking up defensive positions around the *Magnus Kaerner* and pummeling the Iron Throne. Her weight was greatly enhanced with the late arrival of the MC-80

Renegade, entering the system behind the enemy ISD-II, hitting her from her blind-side. "It appears the Tarentae have this well in hand." Stated Commander Wynter.

His determination was faulty, as it so often was. "Sir, incoming ships. Yridia IX vector. On screen." Tanos gasped, exasperated by the chaos they were witnessing. Three ISD-IIs, a half dozen VSDs, and dozens of lesser capital and sub-capital ships entered system. Here was a true fleet of the Iron Throne. "So it was a ruse then after all. And now the trap has been sealed." Calmly belied Wynter.

The Tarentum forces slowly wheeled around to position themselves to face the incoming fleet. The Iron Throne's timing was not perfect, if they had arrived an hour earlier the Clan's forces would have been fully engaged. "Surely, they will flee while they still can and seek refuge elsewhere?" asked Tanos.

The female Zabrak was now the one in error, as the Tarentum vessels – mostly intact, did not prepare to jump to lightspeed. The Iron Throne vessels made no move to engage, and they too began to scourge Yridia IX. "They are toying with the Tarentae, for they cannot leave the system without giving their worlds to destruction. Likewise, they cannot beat such a force." Stated Mauro.

He was finally correct in his assessment. They were baiting them yet again, slowly reducing Yridia IX's surface to slag. Hours went by, as the Iron Throne waited for the Tarentae to crack. It slowly donned on the crew of the *Retribution* what indeed was happening. The Tarentae forces were holding back over Yridia II to allow their people to escape. By freely giving up Yridia IX, Yridia II gained hours of a final reprieve. It would not last forever.

The Iron Throne peeled off a small flotilla to race towards Yridia II to engage the Tarentum fleet. One ISD-II and several small capital ships began to engage. Soon both sides were embroiled in a repeat of the first battle. The forces over Yridia IX slowly moved forward in different vectors, like a serpent slowly fanning out to encircle Yridia II. "This battle was not about efficiency. It was about pain. This is a message to the other Clans what happens when they cross the Iron Throne. Send word to Kiast to be on high alert and send whatever relief vessels they can. These people will need safe passage and what better safe passage is there than SeNet routes to Kiast?" ordered Wynter.

It would soon end. The Tarentum fleet would go down in flames as her worlds burned. He wondered why they had decided to go down to the last man, the last vessel. He remembered New Tython. He remembered how the Iron Throne had done this once before. "If this does not unite us now what will?" asked Tanos. Wynter sat silent for many moments, surveying the closing carnage. "No, this will do nothing. Fear will hold the Clans in line. Perhaps the Collective threat was orchestrated to keep us off-guard and reduce the Clans by one. One less chance of a force joining the resistance. And here, a Clan dies, defending its people and giving them a martyr. We will stay and record this. We owe them that much. The survivors will have their justice one day."

