Target Sighted

The cockpit was alight with a field of green and red lights. With each intermittent blink of color, switches and toggles pleaded with the operator for activation. The hum of the Twin P-sz9.7 engines sung aloud the magnum opus inked by their designer, Raith Seinar. The space was small and dark, giving little room for the master of the helm to ponder anything but hunting what lay beyond the carbon grey hull. Flecks of glimmering light pulled the eyes past the octagonal viewport, beyond the tips of six-pointed solar ionization panels, and into the void. Among those burning stars, prey lingered just waiting to be plucked from existence on talons of baleful green laser fire.

A gentle suggestion was all that was required for the TIE Defender to roll out of formation and roar into a steep angled attack run on the fleeing durasteel beast. The inversion and dive was far too aggressive of a maneuver for the unorganized pilots in their rusted Z-95s and poorly maintained TIE/LNs to mimic. The stragglers who went wide were picked off by the erupting torrent of defensive fire bounding from the point defense system of the Nebulon-B Frigate they were striking. Plumes of vibrant fire flashed and quickly dissipated into vacuum as the volatile mix of fuel and atmospheric gasses contained in the cockpits and life support systems of each fallen vessel burned.

Such a militia, if they could even be called that, didn’t have time or the resources for the regimented training that would be required to make ease of such a rudimentary assault. They were freedom fighters, searching for their own piece of the galaxy to carve out as their own. So, what they lacked in hard skill and training, they made up for in passion. The Defender pilot admired that.

The mission was to capture the vessel, if at all possible. If the vessel was not able to be rendered capturable, we were to depart their station. The modified Strike cruiser, from which the ragtag bunch of fighters had been launched, had perfectly executed the pirates preferred tactic. Makeshift interdiction fields had been fitted to the vessel, jerry-rigged and slap-dashedly placed behind hideously silhouette distorting additional hull fittings. The Defender Pilot did not admire that. The Strike-Class was normally a lovely and sleek vessel. It gave him a passing hint of the indigenous craft that protected his home world of Bakura. They had ruined it’s looks, but the new additions served their needs. Hull plating and bulkheads from old freighters had been cannibalized to fill out the added sections. It gave the vessel a band of calico metal greys around it’s swollen thorax.

The Frigate was en route to return to Principate space, having just deposited another load of soldiers on some contested world, when they were ripped out of hyperspace by the gravity well generator. The effects of which were jarring on any crew. While they stunned pseudo-Imperial sailors mustered to their stations, the flight of fighters struck. They were given expressed direction to disable the Frigate’s engines by an ex-slave who had the audacity to call themselves Captain. They were then to remain to support their reinforcements arrived to capture and secure the vessel. The first strike team were afforded six minutes to accomplish their goal. The Defender jock thought they could get it done in three.

The pilot scoffed to himself, these pirates wanted to preserve the vessel, but they lacked any substantial presence of Ion weaponry in the initial trap. The Z-95s were equipped with a singular ion cannon, but at the rate they were being evaporated, there would have to be some destruction if they were to capture this vessel before reinforcements arrived. Undoubtedly, the Principate vessel had already sent out a distress call, once they were able to stabilize the vessel’s systems from the jolt of suddenly being ripped from hyperspace. The clock was ticking, there would be Principate warships on station in short order. They couldn’t drag this fight out.

The Defender leveled its targeting pip at the one nodule protruding from the frigate’s hull. These cysts contained a set of defensive laser cannons that had been successfully swatting a series of attacking fighters. The pilot’s hands dashed across the controls, setting converge distance and linking laser fire from his cannon to fire simultaneously. His gloved thumb depressed the red trigger, unleashing four blinding bolts of green laser fire. He held on the target for the first wisp of a breath, visually tracing the arcs as they slammed into the target. His wrists twisted, sending the vessel into a half corkscrew, making the port side of the vessel available to strike. The midnight black superiority fighter heeded every input and executed the motion with surgical precision. The ballet was beginning and the TIE Defender was eagerly prepared to show that she was fit to be the Prima Donna.

The green pip leveled on another knobby protrusion and another press of the trigger unleashed another screeching volley towards the enemy. The growth erupted in flame. Just then, a shimmer of blue encased the vessel in an envelope of protective shielding. The crew, roused from their shock, had brought all of the Frigate’s systems back online. The active shields complicated things. The Defender Pilot increased the throttle and gave room to turn for another pass. Clearing up the laser cannon density would ease the rest of the assault.

The com-channels came to life.

“Cease fire, you cretin! The mission is to disable the vessel!” came the hoarse voice of the self-proclaimed Captain.

“They shot first.” The Defender pilot chirped back.

“Stow it. Bring those shields down, Ion weapons only. This is our mark, so you play by our rules. Got it?” the officer replied.

“Alright, but don’t whine to me when they shoot down all your pilots.” He quipped, dismissing any notion that the Pirate had any authority over him.

“Just do as we negotiated or consider the terms of our contract null and void.” The captain threatened.

The Defender snaked a path back to a return course. The pilot brought the fighter up into a headlong charge. It was the sort of brassbound and vainglorious assault run that only a TIE Defender could survive. Fingers danced, recalibrating shield balance to eighty percent fore and twenty percent aft. He had to keep some shielding to the rear, in the event that one of the laser turrets was able to keep a bead on him. Simultaneously, the quad lasers toggled to off and the Ion cannon indicator lit up a piercing blue. The fighter wailed as it leveled on the assault run.

The pilot watched as the first flight of enemy fighters poured from the side of the vessel, four groups of three Interceptors amassed. The mission briefs suggested that the Principate didn’t outfit its frigates with fighters. It was another case of Pirates paying for bad intel. The fighters took a standard runout of several hundred meters then turned to engage the swarming Headhunters and Standard TIEs. By this time, the two capital ships had begun to exchange turbolaser fire. The incoming fire from the Strike Cruiser was buffeting the Frigate’s shields with a hail of fire, but the shields would not give under a single barrage.

If he timed his precision strike right, he could really sting the Pirate captain. He counted. One. Two. Three. Four. Impact. He judged his distance; he’d be there in Four. They’d stop firing once the shields went down. He cut his throttle to two-thirds. The starfighter was still blisteringly fast even at reduced throttle. The pip of his ion reticle leveled on the raised shield generator on the aft engine block. From this angle it felt like sighting down the barrel of a blaster, though he didn’t dare use such uncivilized weaponry he was conceptually familiar with the principles of their use. The little raised deflector-shield pylon was like the front sight post. The communications array flashed past his starboard side as he traversed the length of the ship. The Defender clung to the hull of the frigate, dipping below the threshold of the protective shield’s range. The proximity of his approach allowed his sensors to fully scan and identify the vessel. Three. Four. His thumbs pressed down on the toggles. Two crackling bolts of sparking cerulean struck true. One. Two. The impact left crackling arcs of ionized particles dancing on the plating of the shield. He checked his tactical readout. The TIEs sensors were reading shields at zero. He turned his head over his shoulder, he could see the incoming volley from the Pirate Cruiser.

He laughed to himself as they impacted, tearing chunks of durasteel plating from the shield divested Frigate.

“Be careful Captain! Our mission is to capture the ship!” he quipped over the comms.

No response came back.

The Defender zipped past the prominent engine block, shuttering briefly in the engine wash and soaking up two or three errant laser shots. The aft shields blinked red. He tapped out a new calibration pattern. The concentric green circles equalized around the miniaturized silhouette of the fighter.

He listened carefully to the pirates as they shouted out statuses, the Principate Interceptors were quickly on the tails of the TIE/LNs and Headhunters. The occasional yowl over the vox channels indicated they were finding ease downing his newfound compatriots. He remembered a famed statement from the reviled Jedi and Rebel leader, Kyle Katarn.

*“Your generic TIE grunt is just plain suicidal. And the TIE Defender jockey is bloodthirsty. But the TIE Interceptor pilot, he's suicidal and bloodthirsty. When you see a squad of those maniacs flying your way, you'd better hope your hyperdrive is operational."*

It was just like a Rebel to want to run away. The Interceptors didn’t intimidate the Defender pilot, they would perhaps offer him a test for his skills. The Engines let out their characteristic shrill battle cry as he coaxed the vessel into another acrobatic display of mobility. The TIE Defender was a raptor and even the famed TIE Interceptor was little more than a pigeon comparatively. It did not take long for the hunter to find his first kill, he leveled the vessel on the tail of the first fighter caught in a hyper focused pursuit of a fleeing Z-95. The outline of the vessel appeared on the heads-up display and his fingers once again changed the weaponry selection. Streaks of neon green consumed the Interceptor, immolating the pursuit craft.

The grateful Headhunter formed up on his haunches. The disordered flight group might find success if they maintained cohesion with other fighters instead of scrambling like rats fleeing a pit of hungry snakes. The pair of them leveled on another stalking TIE Inteceptor, then leveled on its six and quickly evaporated the fighter under combined fire. Striking in a moment of convenience, the Defender broke from formation to let loose another cannonade of quad linked laser fire. The third fighter quickly succumbed to the dominating firepower.

“Good work, we’ve thinned them out enough. Let’s get back to the target. target their propulsion subsystems. We’ll need to get in close to keep out of the fire of the lasers. Toggle shields to 100% forward and switch to Ions. The engine wash will bounce you, but hold in as long as you can. If you’re getting shaken too hard, pull out and make another pass.” The Defender Pilot said, complying immediately with his own directive.

His earlier display had earned him the respect that merited compliance with the order, in spite of his lack of command status within the buccaneers’ ranks. The two fighters leveled in behind the Nebulon-B. The wash of the powerful engines shook the ships, they undulated on the waves of charged ionic emissions. Their ion cannons dumped round after round into the seven cowlings that protected the sensitive engine parts. It was difficult to keep the reticle on the intended target, but with patience and timing they were able to eventually find the bullseye. The white-blue burn of the main thrusters began to flicker as the number of impacts began to stack up.

The last bolt struck and the hulking ship lost power. It began to list, floating free in the emptiness of space. Two minutes remained until the reinforcements were meant to arrive. The Defender Pilot was disappointed in himself, he thought they would be in this position sooner.

The wingmen broke from the rear of the Frigate and turned to join the fracas of remaining snubfighters. They were quick to level in on the next of their prey and the fighters engaged in an alternating split-S with their quarry. Eager to escape the clutches of the voracious TIE Defender, the Interceptor pilot gave little attention to the Headhunter. It was a terrible mistake. The twin linked lasers tore through the paper-thin hull of the interceptor, offering up another pilot to the heavens.

The turn in the tides galvanized the other pilots, who had organized into their own groups of twos and threes. Only moments had passed before the enemy flights had been reduced to scatterings of space debris.

The remaining fighters began to circle the drifting Nebulon-B like a swarm of hungry sharks. They remained in circling station for a minute, poking at the Frigate with an occasional blast of Ion cannon fire. Exactly on time, the Pirates’ reinforcements arrived. Four additional vessels nosed in on the Frigate. From their hangars, a series of boarding craft crept towards the silent hulk. They took their turns locking onto the hull of the larger craft, latching on like leeches. The Defender pilot kept an eye on his sensors. It had been quiet since they had dispatched the last fighter, the Pirates would soon have control of the ship.

His display lit up. It was a new Subspace transmission on a private channel.

“Hello, my love.” He said, flipping over to answer the call.

“Don’t you ‘my love’ me, Thran. I’ve just recieved the monthly expense report. You have some explaining to do...” The woman’s voice wavered holding back the urge to chastise his reckless spending immediately.

“Ummm…Well, Negotiations with the security contractors required a show of good faith. Down-payment, if you will.” He said, searching for a good excuse to cover the overextension of his allowance.

“No, no, no. I was expecting that. I was not expecting an additional one hundred and forty thousand credits for, and I quote, ‘personal interests and leisure’. You were gambling again, weren’t you?” she said, the ire in her voice was not as well hidden this time.

“Well, ummm…” he stuttered.

“Don’t you lie to me. Were…you…gambling?” she said, he could nearly hear her fingers tapping on the desk.

“Yes, but…” he was cut off.

“No. No ‘buts’. If you want to spend your own money that way, you can do that. But you don’t get to give away my money. I give that to you so you can continue to enjoy a comfortable life. How much did you lose?” she asked.

“I didn’t. We’re plus four hundred thousand.” He said in a near whisper.

“You are..lucky… this time…You can’t keep doing this though. It’s not about the money, it’s about you lying to me.” She said.

“I didn’t lie to you.” He said, rolling his eyes.

“Not being forthright about what you’re doing and lying are the same thing.” She replied instantly.

“You’re right. I won’t do it again.” He conceded.

“We’re going to talk about this more when you get home. I’ll find some way to hide this from the Regent’s staff…and clean up after you once AGAIN.” She started.

As the lecture began, the sensor sweep began erupting with a list of new contacts. His attention drifted from her list of complaints about his behavior. Unknown Vessels – five contact – Nine Kilometers distant. He brought the TIE Defender about. It was a Principate Destroyer and escort fleet.

The Star Destroyer was of a make he’d never seen before. It was leaner than a Victory class, though comparable in size. On the topside, a hangar spat TIE Bombers into the void. The Destroyer was fast, it was already closing the distance to the Pirates. The sensor log kept piling up with contacts as more flights of fighters were launched.

“Looks like the Principate is just in time to see us go. All flights. We have control of the Liparus. Prepare for jump to hyperspace.” The gruff Pirate Captain proclaimed over the Pirates combat channel.

What remained of the TIE/LNs made a direct path back to their berths aboard the Pirate cruisers. The septuple engines of the Nebulon-B roared back to life and the vessel turned to come around. The Destroyer was bearing down on them and its turbolaser batteries began to open up. The volume of fire was staggering. The Destroyer was two thirds the size of a standard Imperial-Class, but it seemed to be laying down a comparable amount of fire. The Principate Star Destroyer turned towards the pirate vessels and began taking aim. The shields of Revenant vessels filled up with pocks of blue where the turbolasers impacted.

“You’re absolutely right, my love. I am sorry. I was being selfish. I’ll make it up to you when I get back to Seraph, promise. But I have to go now, I have visitors.” He said on the private channel.

“Fine. I’m still mad at you. Have fun with your new friends.” She said, dismissing his apology.

“I love you.” He said, turning the TIE to focus on the Principate Destroyer.

“I love you too, bye.” She said, terminating the private channel.

He visually inspected the ship, it was reminiscent of old Kuat Drive Yards construction and design premises, but bore the marks of bespoke construction. He found something beautiful about its lines, but the amount of firepower it spat was the real mark of beauty. The realization that he’d gone to bed with this pirate faction on a whim sank in. If their enemy was able to build their own proprietary Star Destroyers, they were not up against some mere shadow of an Imperial remnant. They were up against a real threat. The Principate had proved that by bringing this Destroyer to meet the Pirate raid. That level firepower would only be brought if the intent was total destruction.

Even the cockiest of fighter pilots know when they are outgunned and this was no exception. Thran punched in the preset coordinates he’d been provided into the nav computer. He watched the Destroyer’s salvos consume a corvette as the hyperdrive engine spooled. The remaining Pirate vessels blinked out of the blank space around the principate forces, the stolen Frigate among them. He snuck one last admiring glance at the new Principate Destroyer. It was a brilliant bit of design.

Pinpricks of light washed to streaks of white and blue as the TIE Defender exfiltrated the engagement zone. The raid was a success, but not without notable loss on the Revenant side.

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