

Almost There - RtF Fiction #11 – GN La’an

The holographic display cast a blue glow over the command meeting, long shadows thrown further by the flash of weapons fire as Admiral Plif manipulated the recording, zooming in on key areas as he spoke. The after-action review of the Hammer’s exercise-death had proven a useful training resource, just as the exercise intended, although the continuing frustration of Dempsey’s escape had been the one fly in the ointment. While the Warrior had mustered to give chase she had been cruelly interrupted by the arrival of the remnants of the Hammer’s group, namely an Interdictor, as well as a Dreadnaught and a motley mix of nine corvettes and gunships. The pursuit had been abandoned as a second action immediately reignited, while just as convincing a Warrior victory in the end they had lost a dozen fighters and the task group had suffered more damage than they had in the fleet action against the enemy ISD. On the plus side, as La’an reflected, it left very few Hammer assets unaccounted for.

“Exercise stats, records and our own data indicate that the following units remain unaccounted for...” Plif’s voice shook La’an from his thoughts, looking up for a moment he noted the holo change again, representing the fleet order of battle with a number of ships faded out and others highlighted in pulsing red – the Hammer’s remnants.

“We have yet to locate the Modified Frigate *Pliers* or the Strike Cruiser *Axe* – and with them two squadrons of TIE Avengers, a quartet of ATRs and... a Lambda class shuttle of which we are all aware.” Plif gazed at the assembled faces of his command staff and every wing officer with a position of Flight Leader or above.

“To find them we will have to stretch the net wide, in the limited time we have left to make this a rout. I want a rout.” Plif smiled as his officers smiled or laughed quietly. “We have them pinned to a probable area; however they have plenty of other areas to slip away to unless we catch them quickly while they are licking their wounds. Hopefully the loss of the Hammer will make Dempsey angry and predictable, or at the very least direct. General Frown?”

“The following Warrior squadrons will redeploy to bolster search and recon forces – Theta, Psi. Rho, Kappa, Sin, Sigma will remain here. Psi will join the Harpax as an escort, Theta have earned the Decimator. The Harpax will ride shotgun to the task force’s four frigates, while the Decimator will go in with Aeolos’ three gunships to bolster anti-starfighter defences. Unfortunately this campaign has cost us the Centaur, so the Warrior will be supported by the 3 remaining corvettes of Iliad and Minotaur, as well as the Cardinal. Questions?” For once Frown survived a briefing without abuse or interference, a reflection of the serious tone of the briefing.

“Thank you General, precise as always. The Warrior group will be designated Bastion, Harpax’s group will be Redoubt, the Decimator becomes Battery. The attached plans show our scheme of manoeuvre – learn them and delete them before you leave this room.” Plif paused for a moment as the officer’s processed the plan. “One last push ladies and gents, let’s make this victory complete.”

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The hangar was crowded, the additional burden of a Sentinel lander and two flights of fighters compressing the Decimator’s own vessels into a far smaller space – the TIE’s at least had taken their place on launch racks, but the Missile Boats in particular seemed to be causing a problem, carefully

positioned alongside the VSD's own flight of three shuttles and quartet of Stormtrooper transports. La'an watched the last boat move into a stowed position, content that everything was as it should be. He signalled to Mark that the last ship was in place, receiving a short return message over his comlink. Smiling at his annoyed tone La'an suspected there was some issue with cabins or personnel – the burden of command being the complete ensnarement of your waking day by administrative responsibilities. Theta had brought a dozen extra personnel with them, the Bus' two gunners and loadmaster, as well as a Crew Chief and maintenance team to complement the Decimator's now overstretched crews. La'an had no doubt that even with the extra muscle things would remain interesting for the remaining days of the exercise campaign.

Noting his own TIE in the rack above he looked up, a professional eye scanning the hull as the rack cycled his Avenger towards the dark and cavernous store, normally out of sight behind an armoured blast door high up the hangar bulkhead. A few seconds later it disappeared, a hint of jagged panels and gleaming menace moving with sinister intent into the darkness, waiting for the moment to emerge and cause havoc. The image gave him a sense of pride, the squadron had performed well and looked to be making a real difference – they had been there at the beginning and formed one of the first squadrons when the ship had been recommissioned, there was a link of sorts there and more than just a designation or a number. Hopefully their association would go on for a lot longer, but for now the next few days would be key.

“Almost there.”