

A LIFE AT WAR: TWILIGHT

Chapter 1: Judicially unimpressed

So the posters advertising the Judiciary corps as a fun adventure with you exploring the galaxy? Yeah, unsurprisingly they're all lizardshit. Despite being in command of my own ship I was obviously stuck doing whatever my higher ups wanted of me. I still had to comb my black hair a certain way. I was still forbidden from growing any facial hair if there was a war, as per Fondorian naval tradition, and I had to wear my officer's cap alongside my slightly too slim uniform. On top of all that my ship's name was 'Pride of Ruusan' and I **hated** her.

Don't misunderstand me she was a fine vessel, when compared to a lot of the others in the Judicial's fleet. The cuts in spending on the Judiciary since the Rusaan Reformation meant that ships never got the maintenance they needed on time. After almost a thousand years of mothballed fleets and low maintenance it was a wonder that even a quarter of the current ships were up and running and an honest miracle that some of the larger formations even existed on paper.

My Pride of Ruusan was alright in that regard. As long as you ignored the old reactor moaning in pain whenever the shields are active for longer than an

hour. And the constantly malfunctioning heating unit that only annoyed anyone not born on a desert world. And the repairs the ship's hull needed. And how engine three would cut out about once a week, causing the ship to both slow and drift to our port , but none of that was the worst part. No that would be the crew.

My first officer was some high society rich kid from Kuat who failed the exam to get into the Kuati Defense Fleet and so used some palm greasing to get to his current position. His name was Jo-Hase though I never called him by his name after I figured that out, just called him Lieutenant and nothing else. Only person I could really stand from the twenty two man crew was the navigations and sensors officer, a Lieutenant Faxe Strom from Rendili. He was a jolly fellow with a mop of brown hair, who was in his mid thirties, he loved his job and was damn good at making snap adjustments to any navigational vectors and joining me in reading older star maps.

As I was saying we spent our first eight months patrolling the Core trade routes. This was usually a decent idea, have the rookie ship do some safe patrolling along the safest part of the Corellian Trade Spine to get them used to one another and to get them familiar with their ship. This did not work the intended way. About half of the crew got sloppy and or lazy during those two months. I remember bemoaning the situation to R4 one night and her playing me an old military tune to try and get my spirits back up.

Those two months sapped most of my patience and I almost jumped for joy when I was informed the Pride of Ruusan was to be re-deployed to assist the Sullustian Defense Force in locating some pirates. The first thing I did was to inform my crew and begin reminding my subordinates that we were an armed ship with a mission. These pirates would not escape my grasp.

We arrived in Sullust after about a week of travel, including refueling and changing directions. I don't think I'll ever forget the view of those shipyards surrounding a planet of grays and reds. It was eerily beautiful, reminded me a little of if Fondor had some molten rock lying about on a couple of the older cities.

I contacted the SoroSuub representative and requested the next ships to go through the area the pirates had frequented to have their cargo laced with as many trackers as practical. With that done we went to the place the pirates had been sighted at the most.

Said area the pirates attacked was in a stretch between Sullust and Eiattu where ships would have to leave hyperspace for a quick readjustment in direction or else fly into a rogue brown dwarf. I decided the best way of eliminating the pirates would be to follow them after one of their raids. That way we could eliminate the entire group, instead of whatever batch of them had been sent out for plunder. With that decision we waited within the gravitational shadow of the star with only enough power for our sensors and life support systems.

It took about a week before it happened. First a SoroSuub transport entered the area, then only a minute later a trio of snub-fighters followed by an Interceptor class frigate. We didn't even need to intercept their transmission, it was open for anyone within the area to pick up.

"Patch it through" I ordered.

"Greetings, pitiful ship. Surrender your cargo and we shall let you live." the gravely voice said.

After a moment the transport started voiding its cargo and the pirates started to collect as much of it as possible. The snub-fighters were busy patrolling, while we continued to lie in wait. As the last piece of cargo entered the pirate ships' hold they started rotating towards where they came from.

"Navigation I want that vector, and anything on it."

The pirates meanwhile had made their jump. It took navigation a moment before Lieutenant Faxe responded: "Sir, the pirate ships doesn't seem to headed anywhere."

“They could still be throwing us off, or know something we don’t. Bring us to their former position and follow them as soon as possible. Return power to all systems, let’s show those bastards the meaning of justice.”

The ship powered up and we rushed towards the location. A moment later the calming blues of lightspeed enveloped the ship. However I didn’t let it get to me, we had pirates to hunt after all.

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“Sir, detecting a foreign Cronau rad spike, they’ve left hyperspace, we’re about three minutes behind.” The sensors officer said.

“Contact Sullust once we’ve exited hyperspace. Inform them of their position and what to expect. All stations battle is imminent.” I reply.

The pilot started the countdown: “Leaving hyperspace in three, two, on-”

“Sir, they’re jumping again” Faxe interrupted.

We left hyperspace to a random part of the void. Just barely missing streaks of brown and yellow leaving us behind. I cursed internally then spoke: “What’s their angle? Can we still follow them?”

“Seventy x, thirteen y, from their last position, sir.” The Lieutenant replied.

“Bring us about, we continue the pursuit. Lieutenant, anything on that vector within about fifteen degrees of error any way?” I asked

My second in command stared at me, annoyance clear on his face, before tuning to his monitor. He took a moment before replying: “Small Rogue planet, unnamed, no population or installations, uninhabitable based off of last survey, quarter hour out. Unlikely it’s their target.”

Hyperspace enveloped us again. I took a moment to think it over. Then I thought of something he forgot to mention: “When was that last survey?”

The Lieutenant took a moment to double check before answering: “About. 5890 C.R.C. sir.”

“Over a thousand years ago. More than enough time for someone to get desperate or strike some ore without telling anyone.” I pause a moment sorting my thoughts, “Comms, update Sullust of our current trajectory and our suspicion on the rogue planet. Tell them we’ll need back up sooner than later.”

I get a nod from my communications officer and turn towards the observation window. I place my hands into one another behind my back and for a short moment forget where I am, remember some of the random tidbits or historical facts from a world I may have known. It was weirdly hypnotic, like being cuddled while sick or curled up in a thick blanket while shivering from the cold.

“One minute out sir,” Faxe pulled me out of my thoughts. I had to focus, no distractions.

“Status on their transponders?” I ask

“They’re still up and running sir, they’ve stopped at where we believe the rogue planet is located.” he replies.

“Arm torpedoes, prepare point defense, shields to front, I doubt we’ll need them anywhere else right now.”

A chorus of “Yes, sir.” are my answer. A moment later we excited hyperspace to find the engine block of the Interceptor frigate five kilometers away from us.

“Hail them.”

“You’re through.” Comms informs me

“Hail pirate vessel, surrender now or be fired upon.”

“*Kark yourself.*” Comes the reply.

“Cut them off. Sitrep.”

“Weapons ready.” my gunnery officer replies.

“Sir, they’ve some sort of installation here, it’s pinging off our sensors.”

“Target engines, make them dead in the water.”

“Sir enemy fighters are reacting, they’re heading towards us.”

“Send our location to Sullust. We need them here now.”

“Frigate is coming about.”

“Fire at will!”

Three proton torpedoes leave the ship and smash into the frigate. The pirate shields ignore the first, shudder at the second and break when the third pierces through and smashes into the engines.

“Hit.”

“Come about starboard, intercept the fighters. Try to stay out of frigates’ weapon angles.”

The three snub fighters were coming right at us, firing at our front with wild abandon.

“Shields at eighty.”

“Focus fire on those fighters and spread our shields out again.”

A trio of lasers burst from one of the turrets and smash into the first fighter. One of its wingmen dodges the debris while the other continues to fire at us. Another barrage of laserfire from a different turret hits it and it too explodes in a ball of fire. The third one breaks off its attack and starts to circle away.

“Hold position, I want that fighter out of my sky.”

The last pilot holds out for another two salvos of laserfire until it is grazed by a blue bolt. It smokes, it smolders it too explodes. A whoop can be heard from just outside the cockpit as the gunner realizes his success.

“Bring us behind the engine block again and fire all weapons. Maybe they’ll reconsider our offer.”

Another trio of proton torpedoes leave our ship. The enemy shield, given a moment of respite, shudders at the first and breaks with the second, leaving it and the third torpedo to smash into the pirate vessel. As the missiles reload a trio of laser salvos smash into the destroyed engine block. Some simply ping into the molten slag as a few find gaps in the armor and get lost in the ship.

Faxe grabs my attention: "Sir, more contacts, that installation appears to be launching fighters. I've got six contacts on our scanners."

"Give her another proton torpedo volley, then move to intercept. Where is Sullust?"

"Nothing after second response sir." The comms officer informs me.

"Well what was their eta?"

"Five minutes out sir."

"Well they better hurry up."

The fighters were on us. the three directly in front of us were firing without restraint. The other three meanwhile weren't firing at all. Our laser salvos brought down two in front of us, but the third one dodged a couple lasers then passed us. The other three ships meanwhile were already on top of us without firing a shot. I heard another whoop from my head gunnery officer who must have just won a bet on which turret would get the third fighter. Just then a loud explosion could be heard from behind me.

"What was that?"

My Lieutenant replied: "Engineering says B-turret is down. Those ships seemed to have lobbed proton bombs at us. We're lucky as all nine Corellian Hells that only one landed. Engineering is on damage control. But B-turret is literally gone along with part of the surrounding armor. Gunner's alive though."

"Come about, for intercept. I want those things gone yesterday. Maker keep us." The last part coming out as a whisper.

As our ship came about I saw one of the bombers get hit by A-turret. The other two however continued towards us. dodging our laserfire and getting dangerously close.

“Evasive maneuvers. Brace for impact.”

Everything seemed to slow, as if time itself was moving through molasses. The as if the record had skipped, time returned to normal. The bombers had missed their payload and were behind us again.

“I don’t think we’ll be that lucky again.” I muttered.

“Sir, Sullust has informed us their ships should be thirty seconds out.”

“Send them our sitrep now!”

The comms officer started muttering rapidly into his station to get the recording ready and out as our ship limps to an adjusted angle. As if struck by the Maker themselves, one of the bombers was hit with a lucky laser and exploded. Just as our third bomber was about to pass us, it broke off.

“Pride of Ruusan, this is SoroSuub ship Sullustian Industry. Thank you for holding them here, we’ll take care of them now.”

A large ship left hyperspace. It was a Dreadnought, a ship I knew well. I had served in exactly such a ship during my time at the Fondorian Naval Academy. A ship of the line, 600 meters long. It launched its fighter squadron of Sullustian Cutlass-9 Patrol craft and began firing its turbo laser batteries at the immobilized frigate and the station.

“Sullustian Industry, We thank you for your timely assistance. We however request to see this through to the end.”

“Alright, then I recommend you take a rear picket position and enjoy the show.”

My ship had moved to escort position while the fighter squadron took down the last bomber and started scouting for any other hostiles. The pirate ship surrendered not even a minute later and the station followed shortly after.

My ship headed back to Sullust, while the Dreadnought stayed behind to transfer the criminals to holding cells and to confiscate the foes' loot. When we arrived back at Sullust I gave my report and collapsed into my quarters. I slept like the dead.