

Rescue

a short story by

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"Listen up everyone, the Tholians have captured Drake." Gasps rang out among the members of Alpha team, the most decorated commandos in the fleet. Drake was everybody's favourite. Twice decorated for bravery in the face of the enemy, he was tough as they come, and, in most people's minds, invincible. "How'd it happen chief?" Grogan asked. Chief Marshal just shrugged his huge shoulders, "Don't know, the intel is sketchy. One of the observer drones caught it, or some of it, and transmitted it just before it was knocked out. More than that I can't say." Stevens, a mountain of a man stood and asked, "Are we going in chief?" "You kiddin'?" Marshal answered, "be ready to move out in half an hour." Marshal left the barracks to resounding yes sirs.

Alpha team were close knit. The kind of closeness that comes when you entrust your life into others hands on a daily basis. Marshal knew they would be ready, now all he had to do was get the rescue sanctioned by his CO and they could get on with it. It hadn't entered Marshal's mind that the CO might say no, Drake was a hero after all. "NO, for the last time Marshal, I can't spare the men for such a cockamamy mission and you know it." The CO gestured for Marshal to leave, and he did so with a scowl on his face that would have gotten him court marshaled if the CO had seen it.

Back at Barracks, all the guys were ready and waiting for the chief's return. It wasn't a long wait. The door burst open and Marshal stormed in looking like death. A stunned silence fell on the room broken only by Marshal's snorting breaths. "We can't go," Marshal said when his temper would allow, "that pea brained CO of ours says he can't spare the men. Once again silence fell as the guys looked at each other in anticipation. Marshal exploded, "Grogan, what is the Alpha team motto?" "The Alpha team looks after its own SIR." Came the reply. "Then let's do this." Marshal barked and turned to leave the barracks. He didn't wait to see who would follow his disobedience, he didn't have to. He knew everyone of them would fall in behind him. Alpha team looked after its own.

Once outside, Alpha team melted into the darkness as only they could. In 30 seconds they were at the wire, cut it and through it. Like a well oiled machine, Grogan shorted the electrics, and Stevens did the cutting. Marshal lead the way through. On the other side of the wire, Grogan took the lead. His left hand implant came in handy for scanning for mines, and there were plenty of them on this side of the wire. The path through was complex. The mine laying droids were designed to make it that way, but no droid could match a human, that's why they still had human soldiers. Within an hour, they were through and running towards the front line.

The camp was far behind them now, and no doubt, their breakout had been discovered. There was nothing the CO could do about it. Who could he send after his crack team. Marshal knew all this, and was counting on it for when they returned. The CO wouldn't dare break up Alpha, if he did, he knew he'd lose this section to the Tholians, and that was unacceptable.

It was the CO's fault that Drake had been captured in the first place. He'd sent him out on a reconisence mission that was almost certainly doomed to fail. Drake was the only one with half a chance of pulling it off, which he hadn't. Marshal played all this in his mind in preparation for

his defense when they got back with Drake. With any luck, Drake would bring back the information he'd been sent out to get, and that would mean his mission was a success. Alpha didn't like to fail.

suddenly, and to a man, they stopped running and fell to the ground. A Tholian patrol was approaching. No order was either given or necessary. The Tholians walked straight into the trap. It was like watching a ballet, Alpha took them down silently. Marshal did the rounds of the captives questioning them about Drake. He didn't expect any answers, but he could tell straight away if a man would break. Those who wouldn't had their necks snapped like twigs. Those who would were given to Grogan, who's implant could emit micro waves. Seared flesh and boiled blood usually got them talking, and this time was no exception. One of the members of the patrol had been on guard duty when Drake was captured, and knew exactly where he was being kept. Marshal memorised the location and Stevens snapped the Tholian's neck.

Quickly and quietly Alpha moved on towards the enemy camp, Grogan taking the lead scanning for mines. They entered the Tholian mine field about a mile from the camp perimeter and picked their way through very carefully. The Tholians didn't have droids, so their mine field was better laid than they had expected. Several times they found themselves in clever traps and had to back pedal in order to escape them. But no mine field was a match for Grogan. The bio implant in his left hand coupled with his human brain and a life times experience of combat made him almost invincible.

They reached the wire and once again, the well oiled machine went into action. Once inside the Tholian camp, darkness became their best friend. Tholians had bad eyesight compared to humans. Day or night, humans were better, but especially at night. That wonderful ability of the human eye to adapt to low light levels was something the Tholians didn't have. They needed goggles which limited their peripheral vision substantially. Alpha had learned how to use this weakness against them, and that skill was being put into use right now.

Silently the team moved through the camp until they reached the prison block. They could hear voices coming from inside, and one of them was Drake. Ears strained to make out what was being said. Marshal pushed his ear against the wooden side of the hut. Within a few seconds he froze, as if in a state of shock. "What is it chief?" Stevens whispered. "It's Drake, he's telling them how to disarm our defense shield." Puzzled looks came over all the faces except Marshal's. "Are they torturing him Chief?" "No Grogan, they're not, he's just telling them." A sickening feeling came over them as the realisation of what was happening hit them. A quick look from Marshal, and Alpha burst into the hut all guns blazing. Stevens activated his implant. Nothing survived.

Back in the human camp, everything came to a halt as the mushroom cloud began to rise in the distance. The CO rushed out of his hut to see the crimson tide flowing where the Tholian camp had been. They just looked on in silence. Waiting for the cloud to engulf them.