

Taratus

The Astral Drake Hyperspace 41 ABY

Anders folded his arms across his chest, crossing one leg over the other whilst looking as indignant as he possibly could. It didn't matter whether it was the sprinkling of stars amidst the blackness of space, the whirling blue vortex of hyperspace outside the cockpit windows, or the humming of the ship's engines in his ears;

"I must say, I am far from pleased as to the circumstances that led to this situation."

If Anders wasn't happy, he was sure to let those around him know about it.

Meshita's shoulders tensed like an animal on the edge. The slender, fully armoured Mandalorian woman piloting the ship gripped the controls like she was trying to strangle them. Anders heard her take a deep intake of air.

"I swear to kriff, Anders. Keep complaining and I'll crash this ship into the nearest asteroid field."

Anders quirked a brow. "And get yourself stranded and killed along with us? I didn't take you for such a fool, Meshita. I do not typically hire morons."

"It's better than listening to you moan like a petulant child for several hours straight!" Meshita spun to face them. "Draca, back me up here."

The young Jedi tore his eyes away from the datapad in his lap. He looked at Anders and then Meshita back and forth for a few seconds before calmly shaking his head. He returned to what he was doing without saying a word.

Like hell he was getting involved in this.

Anders flashed a smug smile to Meshita.

"What about you, Buddy?" she asked the little droid perched on Anders' shoulder.

BUDD-E tilted its head, letting out light beeps.

"Traitors, both of you," Meshita huffed as she spun back around in her chair.

"Excuse me, Mister High Inquisitor, *sir*, for wanting to do something fun and different. I thought an adventure would be a fun bonding experience, but clearly, I should have pulled that stick out of your ass before we left."

"Bonding experience?" Anders scoffed and rose to his feet. "This is a paid job and one that you signed us up for without our express permission. *You* may be a mercenary, but we are not. I am a Sith. A *Sith*, Meshita, and Draca here is a *Jedi*."

"Hello?" Draca lifted his head upon hearing his name.

"We are not guns for hire moving from paycheck to paycheck. I do not care if the Regent himself is offering you Arx Capital Exchange itself in exchange for your services, you had no right in signing us up to be glorified debt collectors!"

"It pays well!" Meshita argued.

"And I pay you well enough that this job was unnecessary," Anders crossed his arms across his chest.

"Look, I..." Meshita sighed, her tone turning light and soft. "I get it, I do. I crossed a line. It's just... kark, I suck at this. I need you both to back me up on this one. Please, after everything we've been through, if you help me then I promise I won't do it again. You have my word."

"Is there a reason this is so important to you?" Draca asked, finally beginning to take an interest in the conversation around him.

"Is there a reason your eyes are glued to that datapad? Talking to your *girlfriend*?" Meshita asked in a sing-songy voice which made Draca's cheeks burn red.

"The boy has a point," Anders said, coming to Draca's rescue before the poor boy melted from embarrassment. "You seem awfully invested in something that is supposed to be a routine repossession job."

Before he could interrogate Meshita further, a red light began flashing on the ship's dashboard.

"Oh, would you look at that!" Meshita spun in her seat to answer it. "Looks like we are here. Strap yourselves in, we are about to leave hyperspace."

Anders relented, returning to his seat. He folded his arms across his chest. The temptation to invade her mind and retrieve the answers for himself was a great one, though he decided against invading her private thoughts for the moment.

He fully expected he would discover Meshita's reasoning soon enough.

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Arkanis System

The Astral Drake

41 ABY

The Astral Drake emerged from hyperspace at the exact coordinates Meshita had received. Twin suns shone in space, heating the harsh desert world of Tatooine below them. A Tartan-Class Patrol Cruiser floated aimlessly in the planet's exosphere, seemingly inactive.

Anders quirked a brow at the floating ship. How peculiar it was that it was there, seemingly doing nothing.

Meshita engaged the communications and linked them with the opposite ship. "*Taratus*, This is the *Astral Drake* requesting permission to land. Over."

No response.

Meshita activated communications again. "*Taratus*, I repeat, this is the *Astral Drake* requesting permission to land on behalf of the Regent of the Brotherhood. Over."

Again, nothing.

Meshita growled under her breath, slamming the communications back on. "*Taratus!*"

"I do not think they are going to answer," Anders stood beside her, folding his arms behind his back as he inspected the *Taratus* from the window.

"Why aren't they responding?" Meshita questioned, snapping her head to him.

"I think the better question is why is the ship not moving?" Anders placed a hand under his chin, taking note of the lack of activity from the engines. "I have a feeling the two might be related."

Draca appeared beside them "What's the plan?"

Before the young Jedi could get an answer, Meshita rocketed the ship towards the *Taratus*, catching both Anders and Draca off-guard.

"Meshita, what are you doing!?" Draca called out.

"What does it look like!?" Meshita quipped. "The hangar bay is open. I'm taking us inside."

"Meshita, I order you to pull us away from that ship. **NOW**," Anders raised his voice at her.

"Sorry, Meshita isn't available to answer your call right now, please leave a message after the beep. Beeeeep."

"Why you insolent-"

"Anders!"

Draca diverted their attention to the hangar bay they had entered. It was in disrepair, lights flickering and not a sign of life in sight. Meshita brought the ship to a quick, if somewhat unsteady landing.

Meshita shot out of her seat. "Right, time to see what's going-"

She was thrown to the side by a sudden telekinetic blast. The side of her head bounced against the durasteel plating of the cockpit. Her helmet protected her, but the ringing in her ears made her slump to the ground.

Anders approached her, seething like a snake spitting venom as he activated his weapon, the black-bladed lightsaber humming ominously in his hand as he held it close to her throat.

"You ignorant, foolish woman! That is enough of your blatant disregard for my authority! You will reveal everything you are hiding from me whether you wish to or not!"

Anders held his spare hand over Meshita's head. She tensed, squirming and writhing as he pushed his tendrils of the Force deeper into the crevices of her mind. He could feel something shaping before him. Secrets that she did not want to reveal, answers she was keeping from him.

Then Anders heard the activation of a lightsaber behind him. He could see a multi-hued glow out of the corner of his eye.

The High Inquisitor turned his head to look at the source of the light. "Draca, what do you think you are doing?"

"Stopping you," Draca held defiant, his eyes locking onto the Chiss as hard as steel. "She didn't tell us for a reason, Anders. Let her go."

BUDD-E whimpered as Anders clicked his tongue. Why did he not corrupt the young Zabrak when he was a child? A Sith apprentice would have been much less complicated.

Reluctantly, Anders deactivated his lightsaber and released Meshita from his grasp. The Mandalorian went limp, gasping for air.

"Very well. We will resolve the matter here and *then* I will deal with her insubordination. Does that please you, Draca?"

The young Jedi sighed and reluctantly lowered his lightsaber, deactivating it before placing it back on his waist.

"Very good," Anders gave a small nod. "Come along, Buddy. We have a ship to investigate."

Anders left with BUDD-E, entering the turbolift to the lower section of the ship. Draca waited until Anders was gone before shaking his head and offering Meshita his hand.

"Meshita? Are you OK?"

She slapped his hand away from her.

"I'm fine..." She grumbled, forcing herself back to her feet and storming towards the turbo lift.

Draca pinched the bridge of his nose. He reached out with the Force and summoned his datapad to his hand. He typed out a quick message;

Gotta go. Got a situation. Be back soon. Xxxx

He hit send and threw the datapad onto his seat before chasing after Meshita and the turbolift.

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Arkanis System
The Astral Drake
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It was a complete disaster.

The *Taratus* had been overrun with experimental monstrosities devised by the mind of a madman. They had slaughtered everyone on board including Meshita's twin sister.

At least the Regent got his ship back and they were paid, for whatever it was worth.

Anders approached her in the cockpit, sitting in the seat behind hers and folding his left leg over his right.

"Oh, would you look at that? His majesty has come to grace me with his presence," Meshita didn't bother turning to face him. Of course not. Why would she? "Are you here to gloat? Punish me? You were right after all..."

"No, actually. I am here to say I am sorry."

Those three simple words held enough power to make Meshita spin in her seat. "Excuse me... What?"

Anders inhaled a deep breath through his nose. "I said I am sorry. I know the loss of family is difficult. Contrary to what you might believe, I am not heartless."

"I know. Draca is proof of that, but you make it *really* damn hard to like you, you know? Did he put you up to this? Or did Buddy?" Meshita quipped at him.

"Neither. I simply know what it is like to lose family," Anders gazed into the vortex of hyperspace like it had the answers to all of life's mysteries. "The Chiss are typically not accepting of Force users. Once my sensitivity was discovered I was thrown out into the streets and left to fend for myself for a time. Neither my father, mother, nor my brothers had any regard for my well-being. I was alone in an environment where everyone despised me."

Silence followed, but was then broken by Meshita.

"She hated me. Roshia, my sister, I mean. We followed the way of the Mandalore and we got hurt in battle once. I removed my helmet. I was excommunicated from my family so I know what it's like to be alone. She never forgave me for that. Heh, it's funny. She hated me until the end," Meshita shook her head. "I still love her. I found out she was on that ship and well... you know the rest."

Anders stood up and took cautious steps towards her. He placed a hand on her shoulder. "For what it might be worth, you have a place on this ship and I apologise for my actions."

Meshita nodded. "Thanks, Anders. That... does mean a lot right now."

The Chiss removed his hand and smiled. "You are welcome. Just ensure you inform me of important details in the future so that we may avoid any unfortunate misunderstandings."

"Ugh..." Meshita groaned. "You just can't let it go, can you?"

The Caelus System appeared before them, no doubt the next adventure was right around the corner. Secret, and he would never admit it out loud, Anders was looking forward to it.

It kept things interesting.

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