

Hunting a Killer

Bright white light from the Imperus sun made the green orb that filled the whole view of the bridge glow, casting a silhouette on the figure pacing back and forth. It was the middle of the night by galactic standard time, but it was all the same from space. Behind him, the entire crew of the *Nebula-Class Star Destroyer Excidium II* busy at work at their respective consoles monitoring metrics and incoming data. The flagship of the Scholae Palatinae Fleet hung in orbit over the home planet of Judecca while its leader was off on official business to Antei.

Yet it wasn't the absence of the Emperor that had the Fleet Admiral on edge, it was what transpired on the planet below and on countless others throughout the Cocytus System. Endless patrols of the system hoped to intercept and catch a break in the relentless struggle with the Jedi.

With sightings in Ohmen, Almagast and Suzel, it was clear something was being planned across more than one planet. It was the first time the Jedi had been encountered, and Odan-Urr was almost certainly involved. Yet their ability to remain in the system infuriated the Dark Jedi.

"Still awake? You know staying up and dwelling on it won't help."

"Hey Dante, I actually just got another report of a lightsaber sighted in Bronato," Evant announced as he stopped his endless pacing to engage in the conversation.

"We have intelligence all over Ptolomea, not to mention most of our army is garrisoned down there. They can hide in the shadows but it's only a matter of time until we destroy them," Dante spoke confidently, the large physique of the Obelisk soldier dwarfing the smaller Sith.

"We don't have time, with every passing moment they grow bolder. I know it. Why the Dark Council doesn't do more to eradicate them I will never understand."

"You'll get your chance my friend," Dante responded in a tone of absolute certainty. As soon as he had a target, no Jedi could stand against the Imperial Scholae Guard.

A cadet approached the Dark Jedi and bowed his head, "Sir, an urgent message for you in the comm. center."

After a momentary pause waiting for the rest of the announcement Evant spoke up with annoyance, "From?"

"There... there was no sender sir," the cadet spoke nervously, visually uncomfortable in the presence of the Dark Jedi.

"It's terribly early for a random call to be coming in, this had better be important," Evant spoke through his teeth as he began to walk down the bridge away from Dante and the main view.

"I'll catch you later," Dante spoke with a bit of a smile, amused at the discomfort in the cadet.

Brushing past the cadet the Fleet Admiral quickly approached a live terminal in the communications center and activated it. He watched as the hologram of a hooded figure appeared before him masking any chance of identification. A long slender arm emerged from the robes, setting a roll of parchment on the ground. Evant leaned in forward with fascination as he traced the intricate patterns up and down the arm of the figure with his eyes as it moved.

A mechanical monotone female voice spoke, "This information is for your eyes only, and awaits you in your quarters."

With that the hologram was complete, and the terminal went dark. He sat for a moment, his emerald green eyes fixated on the same location. His mind was spinning, exhausted from the late hours, it logically assumed the worst.

Quickly he ran to his quarters. The idea of a strange hooded figure roaming about his ship hit too close to home. Dread filled him as he reached the door and saw the same parchment from the hologram sitting on his bed. *This can't be. How can the Jedi be so close? How could they...*

Without thinking, he picked up the parchment and rolled it open. On either side of the parchment were symbols and markings similar to the ones on the figures arms. In the middle was a handwritten encrypted message. He had to know who would dare contact him in this way.

Exhausted he tossed the parchment onto a nearby table and reached for his comlink, "Alma, bring a large stimcafe to my quarters, and I am not to be disturbed otherwise."

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Leaving the busy cityscape of Nar Shaddaa behind, Evant entered a small apartment in the lower levels of the city as noted in the message he had decrypted the night before. He hardly slept from all the stimcafe in his system, but as the lingering smell of death filled his sinuses as he moved into the room it all but removed any comfortable morning haze that still lingered.

In the middle of the bare apartment was a body cut in two, probably hadn't been dead more than a day, either way he pulled his arm up to his face to muffle his nose into his robes. Curious, he slowly moved across the apartment for a closer look. Blood ran everywhere across the floor but as he scanned around there was no obvious sign of conflict.

Evant was even more confused as he began to move around the body and investigate further. *This isn't Orv. This skin is human. The message from the Dark Council said I would find the body of Orv and begin my search for his killer.*

Confused, yet curious, the human crouched down and began to analyze the body. Simple clothing covered the dead figures body. Covering the eyes was a silver decorative visor, with a single amethyst gem in the middle. He immediately recognized it as Miraluka.

Given their affinity for the Force he reached out and lifted the robes to find the hilt of a lightsaber beneath. Lying before him was the corpse of a dead Jedi. *This doesn't make any sense. I have no issues with a dead Jedi but what does this have to do with...*

"Who are you?" a figure called out in an authoritative tone, interrupting the Sith's train of thought.

Evant began to rise slowly.

"Don't move an inch or I will drop you dead faster than a teek with a trinket, now tell me who you are now," the man demanded.

Deciding to play along for now, Evant stayed put and responded with a mix of truth and lie, "I'm Evant, I caught wind of a foul stench from the streets and came in to investigate. When I saw this body here I went looking for something to steal. I assume you are here to do the same?"

"No, that is the body of Mortheri Mithfaron, a friend. When he didn't answer our call we came to investigate, and found you."

"Honest. I am just looking for something to pawn for a few creds, an opportunity like this doesn't come along every day."

A moment of silence followed, he could sense unease with the man behind him as he weighed his options. *If he is a friend of a Jedi he will be reasonable. Perhaps they played some role in Orv's death.*

"Just rise slowly and move over against the wall. We don't want any trouble we're just here for our friend."

As he rose he turned to face an E-11 blaster rifle in the hands of a bulky male dressed in full light scout armor. It was flashy attire for this level of the planet but standing behind him were two more men dressed just like him. Given their numbers it was unlikely anyone would mess with them.

“Hey, look I’m sorry, take whatever you want this isn’t worth it,” Evant said cowering against the wall acting afraid as the three men approached the body and began to assess the situation. It was obvious they were distraught at the sight. This wasn’t good news.

“You picked the wrong apartment to come sniffing around for treasures,” the man said, looking visually upset.

“Look I’ll just go, I really don’t want anything to do with this,” Evant spoke, doing his best to sound verbally concerned. Had they not been so upset themselves they may have seen through his blatant lie. He could sense the men had accepted their friend was dead, but now grew angry. *Reasonable perhaps in better circumstances, I think I’ve made a pretty solid target to outlet their anger. I imagine questioning them about their friend is out of the question at this point.*

“You’re not going anywhere scum,” the man spat out seething as he fired his blaster into the wall of the apartment between Evant and the door as a warning he wasn’t going anywhere.

The Sorcerer sighed. He was done with the petty games of these Jedi supporters as he gave up the charade and looked coldly into the eyes of the man pointing a gun at his head.

“Put your hands up on the wall now,” the man ordered in an effort to try and maintain control with his dead friend’s body decaying behind him in a pool of blood.

“I think you’ll find it’s you who picked the wrong apartment,” Evant spoke as he raised his hand and tendrils of blue electricity erupted from his fingertips crackling as they arced across the room and landed squarely in the man’s chest. The hit disoriented him as his blaster went falling to the floor.

Quickly his two friends fumbled with their weapons trying to raise them to attack, caught completely by surprise at the display of Force. Without moving the man on the right was knocked from his feet landing squarely on his back into the pool of blood left by the body of Morotheri.

Crimson flashes of light filled the room as the third opened fire haphazardly with his E-11 blaster in full automatic mode. They were quickly joined by an arc of sapphire as Evant ignited his lightsaber. His hand high on the hilt he began to deflect the hastily fired blasts, rushing across the room and impaling the assailant with his blade burying it deep into his hip.

As he screamed in pain Evant looked back on the room to see the first man holding his head trying to recover from the shock while the other writhed in a pool of blood. *Certainly can’t let them live, but I should get some information from them first.*

Quickly moving to the door of the apartment he began to scan the city streets of Nar Shaddaa for any coming trouble before he began his interrogation. Far down the way he spotted something that stood out amongst the trashy denizens of the planet, a man standing in full stealth armor looking straight at him. It gave him cause to pause and think.

As he heard movement he peeked back into the apartment to see an E-11 blaster again pointed right at him. A volley of crimson bolts spilled out the door after him as he ducked to the side, looking again and finding the armored figure gone.

With a trio of speeder bikes barreling towards him, no doubt friends of the group inside, there was little time to dwell on what he may or may not have seen. *These Jedi and their friends are aggravating. I should kill them all.*

Hesitating for a moment with his hand on his lightsaber, Evant knew now was not the time and place to make a stand. These scouts weren’t worth his time. Moving down the street away from the speeders the Sorcerer ducked into an alley and out of sight.

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Evant moved slowly through the waves of scum that packed the Neglected Trooper Cantina well beneath the towering buildings making up the ecumenopolis of Nar Shaddaa. It was

a longshot in his search for information surrounding the death of Orv but he intended to stay out of sight from the Jedi he encountered earlier. Poor lighting and even worse acoustics made it difficult to glean much from the crowd as the Dark Jedi approached the bar dressed in simple robes to avoid drawing much attention.

Pulling off his hood and taking a seat he nodded at the bartender for her attention, "Just get me a clean glass of your finest whiskey."

"You got it," the bartender acknowledged as the yellow skinned zabrak pulled a glass from beneath the bar along with a cheap knockoff bottle of Corellian Whiskey, "Hope you have broad taste, this stuff is tough to stomach."

Evant pulled some credits from his robes with a smile, knowing at least the Force would help him manage the drink, "I'll be alright. I'm new to the area looking for opportunities, just trying to get to know the neighborhood."

"You don't say?" she responded with an obvious tone of sarcasm, hinting at just how badly the Dark Jedi stood out in the crowd as she poured the drink.

"Yeah I know I can use all the help I can get."

"Well we had a huge explosion a day back, some assault shuttle, rumor has it was full of mercenary soldiers. The wreck took out the Shaky Stabilizer up the street so it has this place packed."

"A common occurrence I should get used to?"

"Nah, the occasional fight breaks out but nothing at that scale."

Nodding Evant took his first sip of the alcoholic drink and winced, it was more awful than he expected. The bartender stifled a laugh as she replaced the bottle and moved up the bar to serve other customers. *A wrecked assault shuttle full of soldiers must have been part of Orv's team. Seems I won't be finding any of them for an explanation.*

As he turned away from the bar to look around he was met face to face with a hooded figure. An arm reached out and grabbed his. Evant's eyes widened as they traced intricate patterns almost identical to those seen the night before aboard the *Excidium II*.

"Please come with me," she spoke with a similar mechanical tone to the hologram.

Evant felt a sense of relief and concern at the same time, as he caught his first real break since coming to the planet.

He followed the hooded figure to the back of the establishment and through a door to a separate section in the back. All the noise of the busy establishment was muffled as the door closed behind him. Looking around the room he immediately became much less relieved and a whole lot more concerned.

"Welcome into the fold, Evant Taelyan," a bulky man in elaborate robes decorated in bright orange symbols similar to the ones covering the arms of the messengers who approached him before. It was obvious he was a figure of some importance. Packed into the room around him were at least a dozen more hooded figures in some sort of deep meditation.

"It's all a bit too showy to be welcoming, to be honest," Evant responded, injecting a bit of humor into what was obviously a disadvantaged situation to be in.

Smiling the man reached up and stroked his immaculately manicured beard as his eyes seemed to size up the Sith Warrior, "You will do nicely."

"I take it I'm not here to help you lot unravel the mystery surrounding the death of Orv Dessxr d'Tana."

"Of course not, I already know that whole story. I'm the one who ordered him killed."

The statement was hardly shocking. Though Evant was a bit disappointing for finding himself played like this, his curiosity was piqued and he now found himself in a position to satiate it, “What exactly did he do to you?”

“Nothing in particular, but we have spies all over in your Brotherhood and he knew too many people with his vast networks spanning back to his time in the Imperial Senate. Orv was too much of a liability to have around as we execute our plans.”

“What about his extraction teams?”

Laughing so much he shook in his seat, “Oh that was just for fun, we can’t pass up an opportunity to kill servants of your Brotherhood.”

“So what gives me the honor of standing before you today then?”

“You are a powerful, passionate Sith with a bright future ahead of you.”

“Save your praise, I don’t need it. Just get to the point.”

“You have access to Antei, you have access to Dark Jedi Master Kalen Aquillarum, and we can offer you so much more than he can.”

Evant sat for a moment pondering his response. *I am obviously being bribed. I know too much they won’t let me live what option do I have. I may as well let him gloat about his master plan while I figure something out.*

“You have my attention. What do you have planned?”

“The One Sith have suffered many defeats. Our numbers are too low now to mount any significant campaign. However, I represent a sect within the One Sith that seeks powerful knowledge of the Dark Side, and with your help we can gain access to holocrons and data that would fill the missing gaps to a synthetic control of the force. Imagine how much more powerful the remnants of our army will be if they all could all wield the power of the Force. If you help us in our rise to power, you will be rewarded with an army of your own.”

Evant knew there was no possible way this could end well. He didn’t hesitate to ponder the option laid before him, he was thinking of escape. There was no possible way this could end well even if he wanted to believe this cult.

Without even responding he turned to bolt through the door in an effort to escape. Yet his muscles would not respond to his commands. His entire body was being held by the Force. Panic set in as he struggled for the Force to answer him. Just as it began to answer he regretted not attacking first and attempting to flee as a shock hit his body. He watched blue tendrils of electricity wrap his body as he blacked out.

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Blinking against the dim light, Evant struggled to bring the room into focus in front of him. He could still feel the drugs they had used to black him out fighting his body as he attempted to resist them. It took him a moment to realize that he was suspended in energized shackles and unable to call the Force. Relief flooded over him anyways as he realized he was alive despite his dire situation.

As the room came into focus his eyes fell on a short squat man with wiry hair and a wicked grin on his face, who spoke with a high pitched raspy voice, “Welcome back.”

Evant sat in silence still gathering his bearings unwilling to speak. He was still unsure what had just transpired but given he was still alive he was still of some use which was good. *Well I figured out what happened to Orv, even though it seems I was never really asked. How am I supposed to get out of this one to report back to Antei.*

Electricity coursed through the Sorcerer’s body with a shock as the wiry haired man let out a cackle, “A nice shock to wake you up. You’ll break by the time I’m done.”

Noticing his lightsaber sitting on a table his reflexes had him call out for it, but it didn't budge. Whatever restraints he was in nullified the Force. Anger began to rise, not at the One Sith for being his captors, but at himself for letting his curiosity get the better of him, "I won't give you the satisfaction."

Uncertain of how he was actually intending to resist the torturer, the only door to the small chamber cracked open bathing it momentarily in a bright light. Evant tried to clear his eyes in disbelief at what he saw as a man in shadow armor came into focus as the door shut behind him with a clank. *It's him. They must have intended to capture me earlier when those scouts showed up. Can't say I like the fact that the Jedi saved me the trouble of dealing with this earlier.*

Looking up at the armored man, curiosity piqued again wondering who was behind the mask. He would never get a chance to find out as the entire chamber went dark. He felt himself falling.

His head slammed into the floor of the chamber as he unexpectedly found himself on his back in pain. As he called on the Force to dull the ache it answered. Annoyance was immediately followed by pure bliss as the Dark Jedi felt the familiar hilt of his lightsaber tight in his hand when he called for it.

He left the blade dark, darkness was his ally, and instead he rushed for the door past his captors. Evant wouldn't find revenge in their deaths anyways. Instead he would find that in his own escape. Realizing the stealth armored soldier had lunged after him in an attempt to grab him he slid past to the door.

Opening the door he found the blinding light outside to be replaced by a crimson hue of emergency lighting. He had no idea where he was.

Immediately he wasted no time rushing down the corridor at inhuman speeds, knowing his captors would be close behind. He rounded the corner to be met with an explosion. A door had been blown open in front of him. As the debris cleared he realized it wasn't quite as lucky a break as he hoped as rebel troopers came pouring out of the opening. *Well look who followed me deep into the One Sith complex and took out the power during their attack. Seems I wasn't as good at ensuring I wasn't followed as I thought. I guess it pays to have clever enemies.*

Not wanting to take on an entire platoon of rebel soldiers he turned and ran back into the complex, only to find the first of the One Sith defense force rushing in response and rounding the corner. Caught in the middle he pressed himself up against the wall as emerald and crimson bolts lit up the entire hall.

Evant took a deep breath as he watched the torrent of plasma beam energy flying in either direction. The durasteel wall of the corridor was all that protected him from being at the receiving end of both sides. Even a Grand Master couldn't raise a barrier strong enough to resist it.

When he thought he was all out of options he realized where he was. He was hiding up against a turbolift door. With a smile the Sith Warrior buried his sapphire blade deep into the door adding the molten glow of superheated metal to the flashes of color as he carved his escape. He didn't have anything to say to the Society, but the Dark Council would sure want to hear about this.