

Valtiere chewed thoughtfully on the ration bar as he looked out over the valley, hunkered against the wind. Dark hair was tousled by the howling gale as he squinted out over a hastily pulled up scarf. He'd been on this blasted planet for days, fighting the elements, attempting to out-think his prey.

His communicator buzzed again, angrily, like a stirred hornets' nest. Likely the summit, wanting him to update them. He thought they would have gotten used to his long periods of silence during his hunts by now. Apparently, they still thought he would change. The thought made him smile. Well, more a sneer, if truth be told.

He rocked up from his haunches to stand tall, beginning to make his way surely down the steep valley sides. He was swaddled in furs and a heavy cloak, the cold, though invigorating, ravaged his thin, low-gravity frame.

He noted the rapidly fading footprints he was following, with splotches of blood at irregular intervals, stark against the pure white, though the snow was piling on top, as if the very wind was trying to erase the sin his quarry had committed by marring such natural beauty.

He had been trailing her for days now, slowly drawing in. He could have simply rushed in and ended it quickly, but then the thrill of the hunt would be wasted. And so he had tracked her over an entire sector, slowly wearing her down and breaking her. After all, what was the point of revenge if it was not drawn out and magnified? If you simply matched the affront, they would come back. To escalate showed them what you were willing to do, and discourage further attacks.

But it had to end. The price had to be paid, and he had to return to the stifling politics of leadership in the Brotherhood. Aedile has its perks, the ability to shape his House, to work closely with other like-minded individuals, but it brought the burdens of politic that drained him so.

He stopped as he noted a cave up ahead, and a faint flutter in the Force, a sign of a life, cornered and fearful. Finally, he could end this. Gain closure.

He stepped into the cave, pulling down the scarf. He flinched to the side before the ruby bolt tore past his head, nicking his ear. He suppressed the pain as he continued. He gave the image of an unstoppable force, single eye glowing, boring into the fear-stricken eyes of his prey.

"Demaera Hesas."

She was visibly shaking, either from the cold, or fear. Probably both, but Valtiere hoped the latter. He leant down, pulling the gun from her grip as she pushed herself back further against the stark rock wall, leaving a small pool of blood from a wound in her arm. How strong she had been when this had begun, when he had first found her.

The Raptor landed on his shoulder as he rose, towering over her. Yellow eyes fixated on her as well, a dark intelligence there the sign of its true form: A Force Wraith. He idly stroked the plumage, producing a gobbet of meat from a pocket in the thick furs he wore.

"Former captain of the *Bohemia*, a vessel of the Multiri Cartel. A slaver." She tried to speak, but he silenced her with a swift kick. He wasn't done. He sat down beside her, looking out into the valley.

"You took a boy from a freighter, 21 years ago. Sold him to port Ol'Val. He worked for his formative years in zero gravity, clearing scrap. Then, he was found, for a talent he had, and did not know of. The power of the Force." He looked at her, then, delighting in the realisation spreading across her face. Realising the danger she was in. She was not sat next to some bounty hunter as she originally thought, but a Dark Jedi.

"I swear, I didn't-" She stammered. He held up a hand, quieting her.

"He trained to be a pilot and naval officer, cared for by an instructor, spending limited time with others of his kind, learning the Force." As he spoke, he lifted a small rock with the wave of a hand. He clenched his fist, crushing the rock.

"As he tapped into his rage, he rose quickly through the ranks. He began to master that rage in battles that took him throughout the galaxy for those that had 'transcended' real labour. He became a leader, one who stood out amongst already chosen individuals. Others answered to him, others with the power to crush lesser beings. But he didn't want to be like those that he served."

He turned to her, fixing his expressionless eyes on her.

"He had to do his own work."

She began babbling, as many do when they think it's their last opportunity to speak, to be heard by another. "Please, I'm sorry, don't kill me. I didn't know-".

Valtiere laughed then, an imitation of real mirth, an expression bleached of any joy, a hollow sound. "I'm not here to *kill* you. I'm here to thank you for what you did. Imagine if I wasn't taken. I'd be some uninspired freighter pilot, shipping cargo for richer people than me. Instead, I'm one of those gifted few that can affect real change in this cesspit of a galaxy. No, without you, I wouldn't be what I was. What I do need, though, is a name." He pulled out a knife.

"The individual you sold slaves to. I already checked Ol'Val. He left after I was taken. Smart man. Give me his name, and you'll live, with this lesson in your memory. There are always those stronger and faster than you. Never relax."