

Caution of Character

With a stirring mind, concerning itself with the safety and security of an Empire, Evant Taelyan had another late night with a case of restlessness. Unable to sleep, the Aedile of Scholae Palatinae found himself once again on the grand walkways of the Imperial Palace high above the surface of Judecca. His thoughts consumed with the daunting uphill battle to destroy the poisons that threatened to remove his House from power, and the tireless pursuits of the Dark Crusade at the hands of the Dark Council of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood had left the leaders exhausted and overextended. As he reached the end of the walkway, the Sith looked up at all the stars in the sky and wondered just what the future might hold. He had cautioned himself against dwelling too much on the future, not subscribing to the Unifying Force, but unable to shut down his mind he allowed himself a moment of deep meditation. Thirty years into the future.

An intense response from the Force found Evant on his feet before he really managed to ponder where it is he might be or who might be around. He immediately regretted the hasty decision as an intense dizziness overcame him and he vomited onto the ground, doubled over in agony. His vision took much longer than he wanted to come into focus, as the hazy blob of red before him slowly came into focus with each wide eyed blink and revealed itself to be a pool of blood gathering in the tall grasses at his feet. Reaching up to wipe his face of his vomit he was relieved to find it wasn't his.

Squinting as he tracked the source of the blood he made out the body of a large human male with multiple blaster wounds to the chest lying in the grass nearby. Slowly he pulled himself up. Confident he wouldn't puke anymore he began to move his body. He began finding a lot more aches in his body than he would have liked. Slowly moving towards the corpse of the man he was relieved it was nobody he recognized, even the elaborate twisting of circles on his uniform to identify who he fought for unfamiliar. With several deep breaths of the thick humid forest air, Evant started to feel marginally better. He was no stranger of death.

Stretching out his muscles one by one as if he had just awoken from a week long comma he systemically ensured everything was in working order. Still coughing he blinked hard and began to look around to get his bearings, the Sith still had no idea where he was. He was in a clearing of tall grasses and wildflowers surrounded by trees, but on what planet in what sector or how he had gotten there still eluded him.

"What the frak," Evant called out as he rushed over to another corpse nearby covered by the tall grass. The markings of Scholae Palatinae on the uniformed sleeve caught his eye. Crouching down he got a familiar feeling looking into the eyes of the dead soldier but couldn't connect at all with him.

Reaching down, Evant pushed the eyes shut on the corpse, a mark of respect for his fallen comrade. With a heavy sigh he stood up and began to look around finding more and more of the

bodies amongst the grass. He began to wonder what had transpired to leave him alone in a field of corpses.

Looking down he finally put attention on himself and realized he too had likely been just another of the corpses discarded to rot. Blaster fire scored his worn armor and his own blood stained it. He had suffered the same fate as everyone else in the field but the Force had sustained and repaired his body. A luxury none of the others had.

Thankful for his heavy armor, and aid of the Force, Evant took one final look around finding nothing of note on the bodies he could make use of. It would have been too hopeful to expect to find his lightsaber around and he disappointingly realized he would have to make do without his trusted weapon. Defeated, and confused, he walked to the edge of the clearing into the trees towards what the Force was telling him might be the direction of civilization.

It wasn't long before Evant found himself at the edge of a city, he had expected as much since whoever had left him for dead likely didn't travel too far. He emerged from the tree line at the top of a hill, with a decent view of the entire cluster of fields and buildings lit by the morning sun still rising in the east. In the distance were massive fields of crops he wasn't familiar with, not surprising given his lack of knowledge on the subject matter. All around the plantation were rows of buildings and massive structures obviously in support of the operations. In the furthest distance before more trees blocked his view was a large spaceport.

Recognizing the poor condition of his attire, he proceeded cautiously up behind the first of the buildings and spotted a group of humans walking by around the same age as him. Evant could sense they meant no harm and called out to them, "Hey, you there!"

"What?" one of the humans stopped in his tracks, having heard the call, the rest looked around confused at the random question.

Running over in a slow jog, having regained comfort with his whole body being repaired from the brink of death during the wilderness hike, Evant finally asked the question on his mind since he awoke. "What planet are we on?"

The human who responded raised an eyebrow and took a step back, a concerned look on his face. "Where the frak did you come from old man?"

"Who are you calling old?" Evant asked back, realizing his appearance might be unexpected but he was only thirty-one years old and hardly considered old for a human.

“You, gray hair and wrinkles, both signs of being old last I checked. They usually only bring in young blood but maybe they’re getting desperate,” the human responded, in a very matter of fact tone.

“What,” Evant responded, not even really as a question. He took a moment to look down at his dirty blood stained hands and recognized them as different. He even felt different but he had chalked it up to basically coming back from the dead.

“Well for what it’s worth I’m sorry you’ve ended up here. We’re on Garqi on the Outer Rim,” the human responded, looking around suspiciously as if looking for someone.

“Right, uhm... who are the ‘they’ you mentioned before?” Evant asked, trying to focus on the information gathering at hand, his appearance and apparent age a mystery for some later time.

“Saber Gate, some play on the cat, and keeping slaves. They run this whole plantation and drag us in as slaves, meticulous manual labor,” the human responded, his companions he was with earlier had grown tired of his patience with the old man and continued on ahead.

“So you are one of their slaves, working those fields?” Evant asked, nodding towards the fields in the distance, now slightly concerned at the predicament and a bit more discouraged from his own goals to get off the planet and quickly to get revenge on whoever tried to kill him.

“Why single me out? You’re a slave too,” the human responded, brushing his dirty hair back behind his ears and laughing, “They must be getting really desperate to bother dragging you out here to harvest caf beans too.”

Evant hesitated for a moment and recognized the situation for what it was. He had appeared out of nowhere on the edge of the plantation in heavily damaged armor and blood. Given the wilderness he just came out of any attempts to escape would get them nowhere fast into the mountains. Having not been accounted for previously nobody was really looking for him. He decided to just play along for now. He needed more information to plan a solid escape.

“I’m Evant Taelyan, from Etti IV, soldier and servant of the Empire,” Evant held out his dirty hand for a shake to befriend his helpful acquaintance.

“Garrett Drakeling here, but my friends call me Drak,” he smiled and reached out and shook Evant’s hand eagerly, “soldier you say, I hope they don’t know that, they really try and make sure we are about as unskilled as possible beyond the manual labor.”

“Strategist and leader,” Evant grinned, he had no reason to hide who he was. His slave friend had nothing to gain for turning him in and everything to gain from his presence. He could use a friend.

Nearby several of the Saber Gate guards noticed the run down old man talking to one of their slaves and began to walk over. Deciding to play it as if nothing was wrong at all he welcomed their approach and decided to test the attitude of these slave drivers.

“Hey, no loitering in the streets, and where did you get that shot up armor old man?” one of the two yelled out, a brute human with a clean cut face.

“That’s not company issue, you’re coming with us,” the second yelled out, eager to get a chance to exert his authority. He pulled out a baton and beat Evant on the shoulder for no apparent reason. He felt the pain course through his body, the Force immediately numbing it. Wincing Evant pretended to be in agony as he fell to his knees.

“Back on your feet, we’ll hose you down and get you into something proper before tossing you out into the fields for extra duty this morning,” the first laughed out smiling as his friend beat Evant again in the back as he continued to wince in fake pain at the strike.

Slowly climbing to his feet he held himself shamefully, his friend rushed off into a nearby mess hall and disappeared. Likely losing much faith in his capabilities given the scene, but it was better he didn’t act tough. He didn’t want a target on his back. Not yet.

It seemed that despite being alive, things weren’t getting much better for Evant, still without a lightsaber or plan, and on his way to an extended tour of duty into the caf fields to harvest.

Hours later, having endured the mundane task of hand selecting a certain size and shape of bean as an ingredient in some new drug Saber Gate was producing, Evant finally found himself in one of several massive bunkhouses. Inside beds were stacked three high in rows, with dirty linens and bodies everywhere. He chose a small unoccupied section of permacrete floor and slid to the ground with a heavy sigh.

Closing his eyes momentarily to take in the Force around him and rejuvenate his mind and body, when he opened them he was face to face with the familiar bright brown eyes of Drak looking right at him with a silly grin on his face. “Well, you certainly know how to make friends,” he laughed as he shook his head.

“I don’t know, I think they kind of like me,” Evant joked at his own expense, realizing his best shot at friends was the fellow slaves at this point. He had done a lot of thinking during the manual labor in the fields, deciding that proving to be a capable worker was a solid step one so they didn’t just kill him to avoid the trouble.

“Well the enemy of the enemy is my friend, or something like that, so you’re good by me,” Drak announced as two others approached behind him. A larger human at least a foot taller than Drak with short fiery red hair stood to his left, while another almost his exact size with jet black hair slicked back and piercing blue eyes stood to his right.

“This big brute here is Owen, and to my other side is Trill. We stick together, watch out for each other. Figured maybe we could help you learn the ropes around here so you have a better day two,” Drak announced, looking hopefully at Evant. He still wasn’t sure why he was so eager to befriend him but he took the opportunity.

Climbing to his feet he walked over and extended his hand to Trill to introduce himself, but he rolled his eyes and simply walked away at the approach. Feeling slightly disrespected Evant internalized his feelings and turned next to Owen who reached out and gave a very stern and heavy handshake, “Great to meet you Evant. I hear you’re a tactical genius and will help us with our secret supplies operation,” Owen announced with a huge excited grin on his face.

Raising an eyebrow in response Evant went to speak but was cut off by Drak, “Oh well, we don’t want to jump to conclusions of course, we haven’t even asked but, of course we could use all the help we can get for all these people.”

Drak gestured to the hall around him. Evant took a moment to look around. The slaves were run down and dragging themselves around. In the corner several huddled around one doubled over a bed possibly on the verge of death. An elderly woman was holding a cup and directly feeding some liquid to a smaller kid who couldn’t be more than twelve years old. All around were signs of pain and suffering by these people. Shaking his head to remove the thoughts from his mind he replaced them with glorious images of his Empire.

With an inappropriate grin on his face Evant looked back up at Drak and frowned, “we do what we can for each other, and you’re one of us now.”

Saying nothing Evant looked up to the ceiling away from the room, still unsure of how he even got here. Not wanting to waste energy on things beyond his control he looked back to his new friend, “Whatever you need just let me know. If this is to be my new life, I may as well do what I can to make the best of it.”

“Well, myself, Own and Trill, we steal foodstuffs and medical supplies at night from the guard posts. We have a whole map of the area we’ve put together and know their shifts. We store everything in some secret compartments in a few bunks, take it out when we get a chance and feed and nurse the sick and injured,” Drak spat out, a proud look on his young face.

“Sounds like it’s under control, what do you need me for?” Evant asked, curious to get his hands on the map and schedules for his own purposes, only slightly interested in actually helping in the short sighted goal of minor medical treatments and refreshments.

“Well, we only ever take from the posts, what’s left behind and small satchels. We are worried that they will catch on though. We want to hit the actual supply depot, skimming a bit off the top and getting our hands on enough supplies to last for months. They have so much stored up in there they could hardly notice,” he announced eagerly, as if he could already imagine himself in possession of everything.

“So, you want me to review the maps and schedules and put together a plan for the operation?” Evant replied, knowing exactly what the missing piece was. Without a strong leader, it was hard for the slaves to build enough confidence to carry out such a risky task. The risk of failure was simply too high and they didn’t want the blood on their hands.

“Exactly, proving your smarts already, here are some extra copies of the schedule and map we drew up. Take a look when you get a chance and hopefully we can pull something off in the next few days. There are some who desperately need it,” he replied, pulling out a small stack of folded and wrinkled papers and handing them over cautiously, looking around.

Evant grinned as he took the papers and tucked them into the pockets of the standard issue garments that all the slaves wore. It was way too fortunate that this information randomly falls into his lap. How reliable it was remained to be seen, but it would shave weeks off any possible plan to escape. He just needed a bit of time to study it and validate and figure out how to make use of everyone. He wasn’t even in the guards system, they wouldn’t miss him, he wondered briefly how memorable his limited interaction was amidst all the slaves on the plantation.

“Alright, well first let’s grab some food before the mid-day shift in the fields gets underway,” Drak said as he looked around, without much else to say, reaching out his hand to help Evant to his feet, ready to use his new friend as much as possible to make inroads with his secret supply stash.

Heat made the second shift in the fields fare more exhausting than the first, sweat dripping down his face as his own line of workers was slowly moving along all chained together picking off only the over-ripe beans and tossing them into a bag. Evant stretched out his fingers, sore from the work as he moved along, his mind wandered due to the mundane task. It gave him time to finally reflect on how Saber Gate had managed the equivalent of a work camp on an agriworld like Garqi, and why they hadn’t used more modern technology for this and wasted their time with slaves anyways. Droids had to be far less trouble than slaves.

He had never seen a caf bean plant, and actually began to question if that’s even what he was picking at all as he grabbed a few more of the bright purple berries in a dark hue as instructed. It

hardly mattered why, he just knew it was happening all around him, and although he didn't subscribe to the notion of fate he had to wonder if there wasn't some reason for it all.

Looking up down the row he watched as several of the guards approached one of the slaves and pulled them off the line. The slave looked relieved with a smile on his face as he was pulled away and walked with the guards a short distance to a vehicle that had led the guards out there. It was as if he was their friend, getting preferential treatment. He just gazed on looking for opportunities or weaknesses with those in power hoping to find something. Wondering what conversations they might be having.

If there was some way to bribe the guards for information and secure his escape, Evant could use it. He watched as they all talked and moved about the fields trying to determine which one might be the weakest and most susceptible to a bribe. Who among them had a weak mind and could be manipulated with the Force. They were tactics that he had never been familiar with and hardly employed but any harm in trying would just be considered craziness of a desperate slave. Yet the Sith Sorcerer would be better off inspiring a rebellion and rallying the slaves to his cause if it wasn't for the fact they'd all be shot down on the first charge.

Nothing around him seemed to make sense, the least of which was the fact he was actually going through with the slave work and picking the berries. He was already at a loss for what was going on with the passage of time. Who knew if time was even on his side anymore?

"Hey Evant," Drak spoke in a hushed tone across the way to get his attention, he had picked his way quickly up the line to speak to him, his friendly face poking through a gap in the plants.

"How much longer do they plan to keep us out here?" Evant asked, actually very interested given the heat and his desire to spend some time actually planning his escape.

"As long as they want, until people start falling down from exhaustion and they are losing their workforce," he replied, keeping his head down and focused ahead as some guards walked the main perimeter armed with blaster rifles, "or they themselves get tired of this heat which might be sooner rather than later."

"Hey you!" one of the guards yelled out from a distance, Drak tucked his head low and worked on ahead to gain some distance as they were obviously approaching Evant.

Rolling his eyes he looked up, all he wanted to do was avoid attention but somehow he kept getting it. "Yeah you, old man, you're coming with us!" the guard called out again having met eyes with Evant. The Sith took a deep breath and waited as they unshackled him from his work line and he walked with them slowly, looking up at them trying to be as unimposing as possible.

"We ran our scans on the workforce out here, and seems you don't show up in our records, any idea why that might be?" he asked, a raised eyebrow and hand on his blaster rifle as it to show he meant business.

“I have no idea,” Evant replied, which was the honest truth because while he knew why he lacked an ID for obvious reasons he had no idea why he was there.

“Right, well, I don’t like surprises. So, you’re heading back to the prison for some questioning,” the guard decided, “Red, here will make sure you’re taken care of.”

Looking up, Evant was hardly surprised when he meet eyes with the same self-important leader who beat him with the baton earlier when he first arrived. Not wasting any time he grinned as if to say, you again, and whacked him in the side for no good reason. As if goading him to try something so he could shoot to kill.

“Easy Red, we want this one alive so we can ask him some questions you know,” the other man spoke, in a very unconvincing tone. They obviously didn’t value his harvesting skills or they might be more worried about inflicting injuries that didn’t end in death.

“Oh I know Brock, just roughing him up a bit so he’s a bit looser with the tongue,” he laughed as he gave Evant another light whack on the back. Again faking the pain Evant said nothing and kept his stance small as he followed the two off the field. His mind on the schedules and maps in his pocket they might find.

The ice cold air where they took him was as uncomfortable as the fields, and the small windowless room was just as filthy. Evant waited handcuffed to a chair deep in the underground prison facility that looked a repurposed storage room given the heavy staining on the walls. He wondered what the room might have been used for when the establishment was a proper farm as he waited uncomfortably.

On the large crate in front of him that served as a table, the contents of his pockets were sitting there. The crude folded map of the facility and some hastily scribbled notes on an estimated guard schedule. He watched them toss them there, but wasn’t sure they knew what they were yet. Luckily the penmanship of Drak was horrendous enough that it wasn’t clear without knowing what you were looking for. At least he hoped.

It wouldn’t be long before a screeching sound filled the room as the door came open and two men stepped inside. “You keep causing us trouble old man,” Brock announced as he entered.

Evant rolled his eyes, a decision he immediately regretted, but he was about as happy to see these two again as they were to see him. They stood imposing, hands on their weapons as if they meant business. Strutting back and forth as if sizing up Evant and trying to intimidate him. It was almost as if they had seen one too many crime holodramas. All that was missing was the token interrogation droid.

“You know I don’t like trouble, maybe we just finish you off now,” Red spoke finally after a few silent paces, getting up in Evant’s face leaning over him in the chair.

It took a considerable amount of willpower for the Sith to avoid knocking him back into the far wall with the Force and crushing every bone in his body. He had learned long ago that arrogance was just as terrible a trait in a Dark Jedi as it was in those who followed the light. Instead, true to his role he did his best to look frightened and stuttered a truthful yet non-genuine emotionally coated response, “Please, I found myself alone and covered in blood in the woods, and stumbled into your camp. I don’t show up in your system because until this morning I haven’t been anywhere near your system. I don’t want to die. Please, I will do what I can to be helpful. I will do anything to live.”

Stepping back Red looked at Brock, the two hadn’t expected a quick response. Despite their disappointment they didn’t get to rough up the old man, they seemed content with the emotional response they were getting to fuel their egos. “It’s probably the truth. You’re too old and worthless to us so we’d never knowingly pick you up. Yet still, you’re ours now. We’ll sell you off in exchange for some new younger blood the next chance we get. It’s a win, win for us. Until then you’re staying locked up in here away from everyone else,” Brock announced, looking around the room as if trying to decide if it was actually a good idea to use it as a temporary prison.

Red reached down and picked up the papers from the crate, looking through them but much to Evant’s predilection failed to realize what they were, “What is with all this scribbling?”

“Oh, just something that makes me not so useless,” Evant had a crack of a grin as he spoke, purposefully igniting their interest.

Red reached out and whacked Evant across the face with his blaster rifle with a crack, screaming out in frustration, “You tell us what it is or we’ll gut you and drag your corpse to the fields and bury you as fertilizer.”

The attack left a bruise and sharp pain that Evant fought back against simply closing his eyes and focusing. He was starting to grow tired of all the physical abuse but revenge was something he always considered himself above, especially easy when he truly did feel superior to every living thing he had encountered since he awoke in the field. Thinking carefully of how to precede, Evant finally responded, “I’m already dead, since you’ve drug me into a life of servitude beyond my will. Killing me will now will set me free, save me the trouble of killing myself later.”

The threat of suicide actually concerned the two who viewed the old man as an asset. They were better of leaving him alive and trading him off for credits to use towards a new more youthful slave. That he might kill himself anyways put a time table on that entire operation and as dumb as they looked they weren’t about to miss the obvious.

Reaching up Brock grabbed Red's rifle as he swung it through the air to strike Evant again in frustration and chiding his partner, "Red, calm down. Let's hear the old man out, see what he has to say before we jump to conclusions. You better be quick about this or we might not find it worth the value to waste food keeping you alive until the next slave trade transport shows up."

Satisfied that at least one of his outbursts was stopped, Evant looked up at the two and began a negotiation for his own release, "I can tell you what that scribbling is, information I've obtained in my short time here, which will help to prevent some massive uprisings from your slaves here threatening your entire operation."

Of course Evant wasn't entirely truthful, since it was merely a snatch and grab operation he gained knowledge of, the threat of an uprising would challenge their whole business and was much more valuable to secure his escape. He had brief fleeting images of the punishments that would be inflicted on the few he had met so far at his betrayal. Yet securing his own release so he could get back and protect his own Empire was at the front of his mind. It so consumed his mind he had missed the response from Brock.

"Hey, we knock the hearing of you old man, we told you we'll release you if what you say is true. You're worthless to us anyways, maybe a handful of credits," Brock moving in closer waving his hand in front of Evant's face to get his attention.

"Of course, I'm glad to hear it. I was a free man yesterday, it will be glad to get away from here and sort out how I even arrived. Those documents are maps and schedules of your guards shifts drafted by a slave here named Garrett Drakeling. He is personally gathering support and preparing to lead the uprising," Evant announced, already putting the entire place behind him waiting to be escorted off planet.

"That is very good information, if it turns out to be true. Red, get on the holo and share these findings with the boss and tell him what we've got here," Brock announced, smiling at the discovery, beaming almost with excitement for the praise he would receive within the Saber Gate organization.

"You can just drop me off at the nearest port and I'll find my way home," Evant spoke up to gain their attention, interrupting Brock's brief moment of excitement.

"Oh yes, Red," Brock interrupted just as his partner had reached the door and pulled it open with a screech, turning back for further direction, "Make sure you come back and take care of our friend here next, get him over to the yard for an ID tag and toss him back in the barracks. We may as well work him as hard as we can before he keels over on us. Or kills himself."

Pure anger flushed Evant's face realizing they would not be true to their word, yet he said nothing. Clenched fists kept him from bursting out of the chair and ripping out their still beating

hearts in pure rage. Their lack of honor and keeping to their word drew a deep divide. No longer did Evant think of home, but of cleaning the galaxy of their dishonor.

Red and Brock laughed as they walked up through the door and shut it behind them, feeling invincible as they basked in their victory, not realizing they had just made enemies with a Sith.

Sitting in the corner of the overheated barracks alone, Evant waited with his eyes shut as all the slaves took the opportunity to relax in their own way during the short break before being put back to work. No actions had been taken in response to his short meeting with the guards so they all had just considered him napping. In reality, Evant was caught up in his own rage, was carefully running through his options and strategies to kill every Saber Gate member on the plantation while in light meditation. Additional distractions were the last thing he needed, but it's exactly what he got.

A dozen guards all bust into the barracks, heavily armored and armed to the teeth, with Brock in the lead yelling as loud as he can to get everyone's attention, "Slave ID number R58-8902, please present yourself."

Looking up from the corner Evant watched as Drak stumbled his way to the front ignorantly, not quite realizing what was going on yet but concerned as he carried his guilt deep within him. As he walked up, curiously, he had no idea what awaited him. "I am R58-8902," Drak announced curiously with a concerned tone.

Walking forward, Red turned around his blaster rifle and plunged the stock deep into Drak's gut doubling him over in pain. Collectively the entire room gasped out breaking the silence, catching attention of even those most reluctant and exhausted to pay attention. As Evant watched he himself felt a fleeting disappointment with himself, having betrayed those loyal to him, and giving information to those who turned out to have no semblance of honor.

He began to see the slaves, loyal to him, for brief moments as those under his protection and as citizens of his Empire. They had looked up to him the same way. It was entirely unfortunate timing for these feelings however, based on what came next.

"Let it be known, that you are being tried for conspiracy to commit mutiny against Saber Gate. Your new friend," Brock hesitated for a moment as he realized he didn't even know Evant's name but pressed forwards anyways as best he could, "the old man over there, he told us all about your plans and his testimony is enough to have already found you guilty."

As if the constant attention from the guards wasn't enough, the watching eyes of every slave now recognizing his own act of betrayal put his one day tally at every single person in the entire

facility hating him. Deep inside he knew he never agreed not to tell as some loop hole in his logical mind, yet the expectation was still there and he felt it. Evant was now as alone as he was when he woke up in the forest that morning next to the corpses of some of his fallen loyal followers, only this time surrounded by a more vivid hate that was very much alive.

Chaos erupted following the announcement as several slaves rushed to Drak's aid including his closest two friends, all of whom were beat down and knocked to the ground before the soldiers all made their way out of the building and sealed up the door behind them. Shortly the entire place erupted in chatter as they all tried to make sense of what happened. Many not realizing who the old man was that was being referenced, but seeing as he was one of only a handful of humans who could be considered elderly he stuck out.

"You," Trill spat out, the single syllable was coated in venom as he ran across the room full speed towards Evant.

Evant thought for a moment of not doing anything, and letting the attacks from Trill come, but he needed his strength for what he needed to do next. He wasn't about to die in this filthy cage on the Outer Rim. Reaching out with the Force for the first time since he awoke that morning, he turned it into a weapon itself and almost as if being hit by a speeder at twenty five kilometers per hour Trill was pushed backward flying into an occupied bunk across the way before coming to a stop.

Owen stopped dead in his tracks, changing his direction to run towards his friend to help and check on him now across the room. All eyes fell darted and forth between Evant and Trill almost in confusion trying to figure out what had just happened. Across the way he was a bit relieved to see Trill being pulled up to a sitting position despite wincing in pain. He could have suffered incredible internal injury at the attack.

Climbing to his feet, almost as in disbelief as Trill himself was Evant. On top of the mystery of how he got there, and why he had aged, his ability to call on the Force was stronger than ever. Looking out over the group of slaves who had put their trust in him, that he had let down, and vowed to ensure they would no longer suffer more because of him. He would make amends and uphold his honor, and take it up with those who dishonored him.

"I'm sorry Trill," Evant spoke, in a rare moment of sincerity from the Sith, as he watched several guards walking into the barracks to see what the commotion was about.

Reaching out with the Force he lifted one of them into the air and threw them at their partner, the two of them falling to the ground confused. Next a violent burst of electricity filled the air and wrapped the pair of guards in painful agony until they blacked out. Looking up at the open door he walked towards it, not even taking the time to acknowledge what had just happened to the slaves in the barracks all around him. He had no plan, but he would figure it out as he went.

Opening up and using the Force made Evant feel more like himself than he had since he awoke that morning. It was invigorating in a way that only a Force user could understand, and it was more so than he had ever experienced in his lifetime. It made him wonder if time truly had passed and he had just forgotten, and the missed years had given him a connection unlike any he had ever experienced.

Following his attack on the guards and subsequent escape from the barracks, the entire facility was put on high alert, everyone seeking the crazy old man. Wanting to catch his breath, Evant had run to one of the few places he had remembered from his brief moments with the scribbled map and ended up in a storage facility of sorts. Given the horrid stench of what looked like a hangar that was filled with unlabeled crates, he had assumed they were expired foodstuffs intended for the slaves.

It was only a matter of time until he was discovered, so he had to move quickly. Crate by crate he was looking for any sort of weapon or tool to help him out, but kept striking out. It was as if the guards ran around with ancient blaster rifles that didn't even have a proper charge to fire. Cracking open yet another crate to find some unidentifiable tangled mess of wires and electronics he discovered that the blasters the guards wielded did in fact work.

A crimson bolt buried itself into the wood of the crate and smashed it open as Evant ducked for cover behind an even larger container. "Old man, come out here peacefully and we might let you live long enough to see tomorrow," a the recognizable cocky voice of Red rang out with an entertained tone, "you won't find anything in here except surplus factory equipment and supplies from bankruptcy sales, and none of it's all that dangerous."

Not really wanting to trust what they said, but having opened quite a few and found nothing useful it didn't matter either way. At least he knew they didn't want to bust the whole place open to kill him. He was better off using their marketable equipment as a shield.

"Oh I don't know, I already found a few useful things that might help me escape this place," Evant yelled back, hoping to give them a slight cause for concern as he quickly moved up a few crates towards the far wall to keep them guessing at his location.

A few random blaster shots in the distance were heard, they were obviously on edge and ready to kill. It made Evant wonder if they really were afraid of him more than they were letting on. Pinned against the back of a crate the Sith looked around trying to plan his next move. Various scenarios ran through his mind on different next steps he might take all playing out to conclusion. An attack now made no sense. He wasn't sure how long he could sustain an offensive with the Force. He had to isolate them more.

Using the Force to push a large crate across the way off balance, it crashed to the floor and cracked open. Wires and outdated datapads spilled out onto the floor in the distance. Every guard in the area looked over, giving Evant the window of opportunity to rush across the open floor of the warehouse and slip through a door.

“Predictable,” Evant muttered under his breath as he quickly surveyed the hallway beyond the door. Unfortunately he saw no visible exit, only a hand full of additional doors. One by one he checked and found them all to be closed off. Just as the guards reached the door at the end of the hall, he jumped into the last of the rooms and closed the door behind him.

“I can’t catch a break,” Evant spat out frustrated. At least the hallway outside the room provided a choke point. For a moment he wondered if he could get them to all hold hands for an effective group Force lightning attack.

Then he realized what was in the room around him. Weapons, grenades, armor, survival gear stacked on various tables all around as if on display. Most of them more advanced than the ones the guards used. It appeared they were selling off all the good equipment, not needing much more than basic blaster rifles to keep all the slaves in line.

As he heard the guards attempt to open the locked door he picked up an EE-3 carbine rifle and pointed it at the door. His eyes ran up and down the length of the weapon with nothing more than a basic understanding of what he was doing. Pull trigger, dangerousness comes out the other end. Suddenly, the Sith was starting to wonder if he wasn’t more of a danger to himself with the weapon than the coming guards.

“No way,” Evant said as he blinked his eyes hardly believing it as the rifle fell to his side and then the floor. Rushing across the room and grabbing the polished cylinder and holding it up. It was of a design he had never before seen in his life but the Force spoke to him as he touched it, removing all doubt that it was his lightsaber. His ownership of an unfamiliar lightsaber didn’t even faze him given the day he had.

Just as an explosion blew the door open, Evant ignited the sapphire blade and turned his body sideways to lower his profile to the incoming attack. There were no words in the galaxy to explain the pleasure at that moment as the Sith was in possession of his lightsaber again. As the first guard poked his head inside, all he saw was the old man standing there, bathed in the blue glow of the blade. Standing and waiting.

The first blaster bolt was deflected back and landed square in the attackers face killing him instantly. His lifeless body fell to the floor.

Evant immediately rushed into the hallway aided by the Force. Surprise waited on the face of every guard outside the door.

With one fluid motion the blade cut the nearest guard in half from shoulder to hip. A thrusting motion ran the blade straight through the heart of another. Two more dead before they had a chance to react.

Almost as if the Force was bursting from Evant, an invisible wave of energy forced the remaining guards away from him.

One slammed against the wall at the end of the hallway. Three more were disoriented and tossed back towards the warehouse.

Sidestepping, Evant sliced the body of the lone guard in half. Blood pouring from the body further soaking the floor.

A new guard emerged in the doorway blocking the exit. It was Red, the same brash and stupid soldier who had taken every opportunity he could at a cheap shot.

“You think you’re going somewhere old man,” Red snapped. His ego fueled by the DLT-19 blaster rifle, more firepower than Evant had seen since arriving.

A smirk came to Evant’s lips but no words as a flurry of crimson bolts came flying towards him down the hall. Rapidly whirling his blade in response, one by one the bolts were deflected or buried into the bodies of the three guards just awaking from their stunned stupor.

Then all at once, as if an invisible hammer smashed him in the face, Red was knocked over landing square on his back. The heavy blaster rifle crushed him as it too landed.

Stepping out of the hallway full of death and corpses, the Sith buried his lightsaber into the power pack destroying the weapon. He poured a torrent of Force lightning into Red’s body and listened to his screams slowly fade as he satisfyingly pushed the life from his eyes as if it meant nothing.

The twin dragons, the blade, the Imperius Sun and the symbol of the Empire all making up the familiar crest of Scholae Palatinae clearly etched into the side of the transport. It was clear in that moment that he was brought here by some nefarious means. That someone had sold off part of the Empire Evant fought so hard to protect for a few credits to these Saber Gate scum. They were mere opportunists. Hundreds of small groups just like them all over, killing this one wouldn’t make a difference. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

For whatever reason it had happened, it was undeniable that it had, and Evant vowed now to take all the slaves of this operation and get them back to the Cocytus System. Thinking of it for a

moment, with all that had happened. He began to wonder if it was still there. A thought he pushed away to the deepest parts of his mind.

A brief calm in the storm as Evant moved faster than the guards who pursued him. He estimated that he had killed about half of the Saber Gate members on the site on his way there so they were less reluctant to push for another offensive. Beyond that, any reinforcements would take time to get to the site and his first strike in the barracks was less than fifteen minutes earlier.

“What do we have here,” Evant mumbled under his breath as he picked up a datapad from a nearby table and scrolled through rows of data.

One by one he looked over all the transactions in recent memory active on the device, including the identification of those who sold off the Scholae Palatinae shuttle and left its crew for dead. He had brief fleeting images of fighting alongside his fellow brothers and felt an intense sense of loyalty and pride for the way he conducted his life.

Sounds of footsteps echoed around the landing bay. Metal and latches locking into place followed as the remaining guards of the base began to surround him. Closing his eyes, Evant set down the datapad and took a deep breath with a firm grip on his lightsaber.

“Alright old man, drop everything and put your hands above your head,” the amplified but familiar voice of Brock rang out. The Sith could detect a hint of fear in his tone. These pathetic fools had never truly experienced battle. It would be like slaughtering cattle.

“I’m sorry but I can’t do that,” Evant replied entirely monotone, he already knew what was about to happen and no words could change that but he continued to speak anyways, “why don’t you all put down your weapons and just walk away.”

There would be no walking away. Even if they had wanted to, Evant wouldn’t let them. As he opened his eyes and caught those of Brock. The work leader and possibly highest ranking Saber Gate member on the base given the earlier attacks. He stood behind another guard manning an E-web heavy repeating blaster.

“You’ve caused enough trouble here old man,” Brock spat, anger replacing concern in his tone with an almost certainty that he had the upper hand, “Fire at will!”

As he fired the few powerful blasts that went off would harmlessly score the far wall before the entire weapon was upended and tossed aside. As the other guards in the room began to open fire, Evant ignited his blade and began to deflect the shots. The weightless sapphire blade moved through the air at impossible speeds and turning the shots against them.

“Man down!” one of the guards yelled out as his partner besides him took a deflected shot to the neck killing him instantly. Hesitating to continue to fire his blaster he reached down to his utility belt, “grenade!”

As the grenade was launched into the air towards the whirlwind of blue light, it would hook in the air in a long arc across the room and hit the ground behind a different small crate used for cover by two other guards. Immediately on impact the small cylinder exploded, spreading shrapnel into the backs of the two guards. Screaming agony followed as they let up their own attacks. Unlikely that either had been killed, but unlikely they would survive long as blood began to pool at the ground as it escaped through the open wounds.

“Keep firing!” Brock yelled, unable to admit defeat. He had never faced a Dark Jedi in combat. He was still in disbelief.

As his gunner who had the E-web upended on him finally managed to get it back on its feet he turned and ran. All remaining small weapons fire ceased. Everyone had seen enough and refused to continue their attack as the few remaining guards dropped their weapons and ran.

“Cowards,” Brock spat out reaching for his blaster pistol as he shot one of his own men in the back killing them as they reached the door, “Failure is not an option.”

Reaching up and taking the controls on the E-web Brock stared with an unbridled fury in his eyes directly at Evant. He had maintained control for so long. He wouldn't let some old man take it away. Blue tendrils of violent Force energy filled the air and closed the gap quickly between Evant and the enraged leader of the work force.

Unexpectedly, it ceased up his whole body as it tightened down on the trigger of the E-web. Sidestepping but not letting up on his attack, lightning still pouring from his hands into the human's body, he watched as a torrent of crimson energy poured from the weapon and slammed into the side of the Scholae Palatinae shuttle behind him.

Intense particle beam energy tore through the armor on the side of the shuttle as Evant continued step by step towards the man feeling his life slip away at the receiving end of the Force lightning. As he got within striking distance he let up on the lightning, Brock just inches from life but still alive as the E-web blaster finally let up and silenced itself.

Breathing heavily having just endured more pain than he had ever experienced in his life, Brock turned the E-web towards Evant and pulled the trigger.

Time almost stood still for a Dark Jedi. In that brief moment Evant already knew what was coming before it even happened. Taking a powerful blaster bolt to the chest would end his life almost instantly as it superheated his entire fragile human body. Yet seeing it happen before it happened was precisely why it wouldn't.

Almost simultaneously the sapphire blade of Evant's lightsaber cut the weapon down the center. As he cut in the power systems were separated from the cooling coils and barrel. As Brock pulled the trigger with his final moments, the power generator from the weapon would dump energy into a heavily damaged system.

It exploded.

In an instant Brock's weakened body was burned up by the energy. All the skin on his body melted as his body was thrown backwards several meters onto the ground. He would only hang onto life for several more moments before finally succumbing to death.

The Force was a powerful ally as an invisible physical barrier was manifested to protect the Sith from the explosion. Yet it would only save him from the intense heat. He was still physically knocked back several meters landing on his back.

Evant pulled his lightsaber hilt in close and held it to his chest as he looked up through the open ceiling of the landing bay mostly blocked out by a thick black smoke that poured from the heavily damaged shuttle parked nearby.

Fighting the pain he leaned up and spotted a familiar young face. He met eyes with Drak. Behind him Evant could make out the silhouettes of Owen and Trill. Their appearance meant that at least in that moment, Saber Gate had no control.

Smiling, Evant just sat there and made no moves, unsure how his former friends now viewed him. His betrayal was still only hours old.

The Sith couldn't wait to offer them a home in the Cocytus System.

The Force quieted down a bit as if exiting an expressway as cool crisp night air replaced the humid stale stench of his last breath. It was a feeling that immediately alerted the Sith and brought him to his feet as if he had just awoken from a dream where he was falling. Reaching down he gripped his lightsaber hilt hanging from his belt, his hand running along the familiar curves bringing a bit of peace to his frantic mind. Next his hands went to his face to trace the familiar shape. It was like returning from an out of body experience. Deep inside Evant Taelyan reflected on a deep guilt he had not felt in years at a lapse in loyalty and judgment, deciding to dwell on it only for a moment as he renewed his vows to bring safety and security to the Empire at all costs. He finally took a deep breath to calm down and looked to the stars, wondering if he was forgiven for something that may or may not have even happened.