**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**38 ABY**

The Arcona summit had gathered for an emergency meeting called by Consul Marick Arconae. From the Hapan down to the various team leaders, as well as the Arconae, everybody had stopped what they were doing to attend.

“Orders have come from the Dark Council. We are going to be assisting them in their assault on the planet of Nicht Ka. From what I’ve been told, we’re doing this to finally put an end to Darth Esoteric, but I have a little more to share with you. Apparently there is a traitor among the Dark Council. Somebody who has been assisting the One Sith,” Marick stated gravely.

The room immediately became fraught with accusations and rumours. It had not been long since Arcona itself had nearly been split into two, and the wounds had not yet healed properly.

“I say we tell the Council they’re on their own. I’ve had enough of us risking *OUR* resources for *THEIR* wars.” Andrelious replied gruffly.

“Inahj, you’re not Rollmaster anymore. Remember your place,” Invictus snapped.

“For one, it’s *MIMOSA­*-Inahj. For two, at least I’ve *GOT* a position, and for three, what the hell are you even doing here? You’re not Arconae. You’re hanging on to a past glory a damn sight more than I am,” the Soulfire Captain answered.

“Gentlemen, please. Remember, Andrelious, that we can only expand our fleet with permission from the Dark Council. If we don’t help them now, what chance do we have of getting the ships you keep asking for?” Marick asked.

“We don’t get the ships that we *NEED* even when given the chance. How much of our allowance did you waste on the *Nighthawk*? Or those underpowered Rebel fighters? If things turn nasty, we barely have the power to take on the frakking lighties, let alone a Clan with a proper military such as Taldryan,” the former Rollmaster hissed.

Arcia Cortel stared icily at her fellow Battleteam Leader. “Are you implying my ship’s a waste, Inahj?”

“The modifications could have been made to the *Valour’s Fall*. I’m not opposed to the concept of the *Nighthawk*, just the amount that was spent on getting a new Agave-class when we had a perfectly good one already in our meagre navy,” Andrelious responded.

“We’re losing sight of the task at hand, here. We’ll sort out any changes to our armed forces once we’ve headed to Nicht Ka. For now I want all of you to prepare – the One Sith are a still a big threat, and remember, Esoteric was responsible for the death of one of our Arconae. Quaestors, come with myself and Legorii. The Aediles will be responsible for briefing their Battleteam Leaders,” the Shadow Lord ordered, clambering out of his chair and walking quickly out the room, followed by his Proconsul, as well as Cethgus and Valtiere and their assorted Cythraul hounds.

“Gentleman, we have assigned each of you a nearby office. With things as they are, both Atyiru and I feel that discretion is in order.” Turel declared.

“Hang on a minute! We’re all team leaders together. That means you can brief us all in here right now. I don’t know how the lighties do it, but here in Arcona-“ Andrelious started.

“Now, now, Andrel,” Atyiru interrupted. “Turel here may be new, but Marick trusts him. And so should we.”

“I’m not surprised to see you defend him. Two lighties together…” the Warlord mused, half-jokingly.

“Wherever he’s from, he’s Arconan now. Shouldn’t that be enough?” the Galeres Aedile retorted.

Andrelious nodded. “As long as Kooki and my girls are safe, Atyiru. You know that they’re my primary concern right now.”

“I’m sure Turel, along with Celevon and Valtiere, will do his best to keep them safe. When this is over, you’ll be able to get back into Kooki’s kitchen just in time to make her a sandwich,” Atyiru quipped. “For now, head to room 17-Esk. I’ll be along shortly.”

**Room 17-Esk**

Andrelious had been waiting around half an hour by the time that his Aedile finally arrived. As usual, the Miraluka was smiling despite the seriousness of the situation. Mimosa-Inahj regarded her, his own facial expression much more sombre.

“Do you smile even when you’re killing? You know how much that gives me the creeps,” the Warlord stated, forgetting that the Aedile was now supposed to be his superior.

“Smiling while killing would be more *YOUR* forte, Andrelious.”

Andrelious smiled briefly. “Shall we save the banter until we’ve dealt with the Council’s latest whim? If we all survive, I think I still owe you a drink or two for helping with the twins.”

“You owe me nothing, my friend,” the Krath replied gently.

“So what do you need Soulfire to do? I can get us prepped and ready for anything in under half an hour,” the Warlord stated.

“You’re the highest ranking team leader, so we’re giving you a special mission. The Council have asked Arcona to root out the traitor on the Dark Council. With the other teams busy on their missions, we’d like you and Soulfire to lead this investigation,” Atyiru declared.

“Very well. I accept this mission. I’ll need quite a free hand in it, however. The Dark Council are mostly Elders. That they’ve stayed covered up so long suggests that this won’t be an easy mission to complete,” the ex-Imperial responded, noting some details down on his datapad.

“Just one more thing, Andrel. I know that James and Socorra are both innocent of this. Will you at least consider ruling them out?” the Miraluka asked, already knowing Mimosa-Inahj’s answer.

“No. Don’t let your loyalty to them affect your judgment. We’re Dark Jedi. Most of that council would stab their own mother in the back if they thought it would help them. In fact, half of them probably have. I consider every single one of them a suspect. Now, I’m going to go and get my things and brief my team. Good day, Atyiru.” Andrelious answered, moving quickly to his feet.

**Mimosa-Inahj Household**

**Selen**

Andrelious keyed in his personal access code. The front door slid open, allowing the Warlord access to the home that he shared with his wife, Kookimarissia.

On entering, the ex-Imperial realised that Kooki was not in the lounge, but could sense her, along with two other similar Force imprints nearby. He remembered not to call out, in case the Knight or their two daughters were asleep. Instead, he crept towards the master bedroom.

“You’re home. Just in time to help bathe the twins!” Kooki announced, handing a silent but awake baby to the Warlord. Andrelious gazed lovingly at his daughter as she nestled gently into his chest.

“Hello..Etty?” the Soulfire Captain asked. He was still a little unsure as to which twin was which, even though they were now over a month old.

“You’re getting better. That’s four times in a row you’ve got it right, darling.” Kooki said as she began stripping Poppy down. The coldness in the air caught the tiny girl by surprise, causing her to start wailing. The noise startled her twin, who quickly began to cry also.

The new mother sighed, scooping Etholimarissia back from Andrelious. Moments later she had extracted her breasts and each baby was slurping contentedly. As they fed, Kooki skilfully slid the rest of Poppeliamarissia’s outfit from her body, then undressed Etty as well.

“You may as well make us a drink while they feed. I’ll have a spiced caf,” the Qel-Droman snapped, a little forcefully. Andrelious knew better than to argue and headed to the kitchen to brew the demanded beverage.

A few minutes later the Sith returned carrying two large cups of caf. He handed one to his wife, who smiled warmly at him before removing first Poppy, then Etty, who were now soothed and ready for their baths. Both parents knew that tears would probably return when the infants were placed in the lukewarm water, but were not deterred. Andrelious lowered Etty gently into her bath as Kooki did the same with Poppy. The twins thrashed and whinged a little in the water, but their parents calmly washed their tiny bodies down, before removing them from their baths and wrapping them in their personalised black and purple towels. Once they felt dry and warm, the twins fell asleep.

After placing the twins into their basket, Andrelious and Kooki moved to the lounge, their cups of caf as yet untouched.

“So, I suspect Edraven’s trying to make you stay at home. For once he may have a point. Are you going to listen to him?” the Warlord enquired as he relaxed on a large settee.

“I’ll tell you what I frakking told him! I am a new mother, *NOT* an invalid! I’m still perfectly frakking capable of taking part in this frakking invasion!” Kooki answered, irritated.

“You know we’re not supposed to take the twins too far away right now. Especially to a war zone. Now you’re not in Galeres you won’t have Atyiru on hand if they become ill. They’re still weak.” Andrelious pleaded, remembering his Aedile’s advice. The girls, as was common with twins, had been born premature and were still well below the average birth weight of a Human baby. The Force sensitivity helped, but they still needed a lot of extra support as they became used to the outside world.

“There are other capable medics! If you’re so concerned *YOU* can stay at home with them while I go to war, but I am frakking going, you Imperial bastard!” the Alderaanian hissed quietly.

“Alright. Just be careful. Two Force sensitive babies would be a big target to the One Sith. Just the thought of not seeing these girls grow up makes me feel sick to my stomach,” the ex-Rollmaster answered, also mindful of his sleeping daughters.

“Well, you’re used to *THAT* one. I suppose you and Saskia will be working together?” Kooki questioned, still unused to the fact that her husband’s second-in-command was also his eldest child.

“She’s my Sergeant. Of course I’ll be working with her. Her skills will come in particularly useful for the mission we’ve been given, as it happens. Though I really wish I still had some of the old team as well. It’s going to be tough.”

Kooki, though still annoyed, managed a reassuring smile. “You’ll be fine, darling. Do I get to know what the mission is?”

“It’s classified, given its nature, but I’m not in the business of hiding things from my wife, and besides given the number of people present I can’t see how telling one more is going to be a problem. It turns out that one of the Dark Council is a traitor. I’m to lead the investigation into exactly which one of them it is,” the Warlord explained.

“One of the Council? Just how far up does this rot go? If the One Sith have an agent there, who knows who we can trust?” the female mused.

“Now you’re starting to understand the people around here. I won’t lie to you, darling, this mission is a little risky. I’m dealing with the possibility of an Elder betraying the Brotherhood. If my investigations get discovered, I can’t guarantee my safety. Or-“ the former Imperial stated, cutting off when he noticed his wife glaring at him.

“I already said that I’m perfectly capable of looking after myself. Besides, you know Celevon wouldn’t allow any harm to come of me or the girls.”

Andrelious shook his head. “And you also just said yourself that we don’t know who we can trust. Aside from you, there’s nobody I fully trust right now. Maybe Atyiru, as I know she’s no fan of the Council, but she was quite defensive of Socorra and James. Her and her frakking ‘families’,”

“You really think Socorra could be behind this?” the Alderaaian queried.

“It could be any one of them. Personally I very much doubt that James in particular is involved, but Socorra’s still only an Equite. It’s possible she’s been swayed without even knowing it,” Andrelious replied.

A shrill cry began to ring out throughout the homestead. Kooki sighed as she drank the last of her steaming caf. Andrelious finished his drink, too, before starting to head towards his daughters.

Poppy and Etty were crying as loudly as their tiny lungs would allow them as the Warlord carefully scooped both babies, taking great care to support their heads. The girls seemed to know immediately that it was their father, and calmed a little, though continuing to wail softly. Andrelious kissed each baby softly on their foreheads.

“I’ll see you soon, girls. Daddy’s going to catch a traitor.”

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

It was the first time that Soulfire had been given a mission since the Shadow Clan had divided among supporters of the current Quaestors and those who backed the veteran di Tenebrous Arconae. The majority of Soulfire had backed the clan’s elite, having been led by Nadrin Erinos, one of the Arconae, until shortly before the conflict. The one member who had deviated had been Riverche, the team’s communication specialist. Unlike the other Galerean teams, Andrelious had allowed Riverche to continue her duties unpunished, choosing to blame Cethgus for what had happened instead.

The team’s membership had already gathered by the time that Andrelious arrived. Nadrin and Kyo were in a conversation amongst themselves, while River tinkered with her comms equipment. Saskia sat on her own to one side of the room, not really integrating herself with the gathering despite her status as the team’s Sergeant. Stele bounded in past Andrelious, the Cythraul noticing his younger sibling Row’de at Nadrin’s feet.

“So. Our first mission under our new Captain. What’s it to be, Andrel?” Nadrin asked as his fellow Warlord sat at the oval-shaped table.

“I’ll get the disappointment out of the way first. We’re not going to be going to Nicht Ka right away.” Mimosa-Inahj stated simply. A loud groan filled the room, though the less militant members of the team seemed almost relieved.

“I know. I was hoping to lead us into battle as well. But we’ve got a special mission. It turns out that we have a traitor on the Dark Council. The summit have tasked us with discovering exactly who that is,” the former Imperial continued.

“You make it sound so easy.” Kyo interjected. “Can we be sure it’s not a trap?”

“Who’d be trapping us, *di’kut*?” Nadrin scoffed.

“Trap or not, we must be very careful with how we proceed. It’s highly likely that the traitor’s taken the time to indoctrinate the majority or even the entirety of their staff, if their staff weren’t already One Sith plants.” Andrelious said.

“I’ve not heard anything like that on the airwaves. That is, unless the trouble with the mining droids in the asteroid field has something to do with it.” Riverche added.

“The issue with the droids, as well as our apparently dwindling medical supplies, are going to be dealt with once we get back from Nicht Ka. Right now we need to be focusing on finding this traitor. Have any of you heard *ANYTHING* during the past few months? And how about the DIA, Nadrin? Do they have anything?” the ex-Imperial queried.

“There was something a few months ago. An agent called Derfla Nala intercepted some coded messages during the mission to Bosthirda. Unfortunately he was terminated before he could finish relaying them,” the Mandalorian declared, seemingly uncaring about Agent Nala’s fate.

“Who was he terminated by? The DIA would have records of this sort of thing. Find me the file as soon as you can.” Andrelious instructed.

“I already thought to do that. He’s marked as MIA, not killed. But I know that’s wrong. I heard his death cry over the comlink.” Nadrin replied.

The elder Human sighed. “Alright. So we need to be careful even with the DIA right now. They either have rogue agents within, or the traitor has otherwise got access to their files. And they’re supposed to be secure.”

“Really, dad? I got into there about a day after I arrived here. You wouldn’t believe how many people have simple passwords.” Saskia interrupted.

“Are you meaning to say that you’ve been snooping at our records, Ortega?” Nadrin snorted.

“Snooping, doing the occasional alteration, that sort of thing. I didn’t touch Nala’s record, but I did notice it had been changed,” the Cirrian stated calmly.

“Can you access what it said before? Or at least find out who edited it?” Andrelious asked.

“No. Whoever edited it knew what they were doing. They actually dropped a whole new file on top of the old one, so the history would be erased. As for who, all I could be sure of is that the change was made from a location outside of the Dajorra System. Something else that the DIA claim to be impossible,” Saskia responded, smiling smugly.

Nadrin, clearly irritated by the Archpriestess, rose to his feet, glaring at the female as he walked past. Marching over to Andrelious, he bent down to whisper into his successor’s ear.

“Your *shabla* daughter, she’s not going to last long if she keeps poking her nose into things.”

“Nadrin. We need to trust each other right now. Saskia may not be the best fighter, but she’s already proven her worth to this team if she’s able to do that sort of thing. I’m certainly glad that we managed to get her back from Dark Forge. Apparently her skillset was going to waste over there,” Mimosa-Inahj answered, not lowering his voice as if to ram the message of mutual trust home.

“Of course, I’m sure Celevon could find work for me if you don’t want me here…” Saskia added.

“No, Saskia. You’re as much part of Soulfire now as any of us. Your slicing skills are on a level with those of Celahir – and we’ve lost him for good to Cortel and her *Nighthawk*. You stay here.” Andrelious spat.

“So, perhaps rather than bickering, we can actually start working on finding the traitor?” Riverche questioned.

“I was about to get to that, River. Keep up what you’re doing with monitoring comms traffic. Nadrin, I want you and Saskia to dig a little deeper into what’s happening with DIA personnel files. Find out if Timeros knows anything. Wes, get working on a set of disguises that will allow into the other Clan and House systems without too much trouble. Draith, you’re with River for now. Kyo, we haven’t much need for a medic, so I’m clearing you to head to Nicht Ka. Your skills will be needed there right now...until I catch the traitor, anyway. Then we’ll need you.” Andrelious ordered snappily.

-x-

Andrelious studied the datapad carefully. He was observing a list of communications that had been intercepted by the DIA during the assault on Bosthirda. The messages had of course been encrypted, but thanks to the work of Timeros’ men, they had eventually been decoded into plain basic. None of them, however, pointed in any particular direction to the traitor. Several were from Darth Esoteric, demonstrating that the Sith Lord who had troubled the Brotherhood recently was regularly receiving updates from the traitor. Scrolling idly down the list, Mimosa-Inahj began to wish that he hadn’t agreed to give up smoking. It was then he noticed the last message’s header: *Discovery*.

Wondering how it had not been pointed out to him already, Andrelious accessed the message.

*Message 1S-10278-619911*

*DIA Priority Code: Low*

*Subject: Discovery*

*From: Data Not Available*

*Lord Esoteric,*

*It’s possible that I have been discovered whilst sending my latest transmission. Somebody from Arcona’s Intelligence Network has been successful in intercepting several of your transmissions. Whilst I cannot be certain that he has been able to identify me, I will not be taking the risk of sending further transmissions until the agent…*

*TRANSMISSION LOST*

The Warlord frowned. This message was the only one that the DIA had that had been sent from the traitor, and the majority of it had failed to send.

As he began to study the message for any clues, Andrelious heard the quiet hiss of the door, and looked up to see Nadrin and Saskia entering the room. Stele, Andrelious’ Cythraul, peered up at the new arrivals, regarding them for a few seconds before going back to sleep.

“You obviously have some news for me,” the older Sith stated, grabbing a nearby bottle of Corellian brandy and some glasses. He went to pour out three measures of the liquid, but noticed his daughter screwing up her nose.

“Ah yes. No alcohol for you. I forget..” the Soulfire Captain observed, pouring two brandies and handing one to Nadrin.

“We found a message from the traitor. Unfortunately we have only half of the message, and the sender data was corrupted. Saskia managed to retrieve something, though. The message was sent from Antei,” the Mandalorian explained.

“I’m glad that you brought such key information to me so quickly. That allows me to narrow it down to…ALL of the frakking Council!” Andrelious snapped. “And I just read that message myself. I was hoping there’d be something a bit more…solid.”

“We have considered something else. We could check out some of the Agency’s spy satellites.” Saskia replied.

Andrelious did not look impressed. “Any reason you haven’t done that already?”

“Yes. For security purposes, we usually check most of those locally. Timeros didn’t feel it was wise to activate their remote transmissions, in case one of the other Clans decides to attack us while our fleet is tied up at Nicht Ka.” Nadrin explained.

“So what are you saying? We need to be travelling to Orion, Yridia and the other Clan and House systems? With the fleet about to head off?” Andrelious questioned.

“Exactly. I already sent a message to the rest of the team. They’re going to meet us as Giletta Spaceport. Oh. And we’ve got a special guest coming with us for this one,” the female declared.

The oldest of the trio sighed. “Another trial member? Very well. I just hope they can fight as we’re down a militant member or two right now. And did you inform the Summit of this?”

“Well. This one can fight, but she’s not exactly militant…” Saskia answered.

“Oh great. So not only are we avoiding a War Zone, but you’ve got us lumbered with the winner of the last three ‘Miss Cute and Cuddly’ contests. I really don’t see what Atyiru will bring to this mission, other than a whole load of niceness and smiles. Neither of which are a Soulfire calling card.” Andrelious hissed.

“We needed someone with a sense of humour, dad. Yours is...well..shall we get to the Spaceport?” Saskia stated dryly.

“Also, if we have Atyiru with us, we’ll be absolved from blame if things go wrong.” Nadrin added.

“Fine,” the ex-Rollmaster sighed. “We’d better get to the Spaceport.”

**Soulfire Ready Room**

**Agave-Class Picket *Valour’s Fall***

**Selen Orbit**

Since taking over command of Soulfire, Andrelious had not yet visited the *Valour’s Fall*, even though he was now the ship’s captain. This had not gone down well with the former Imperial, who had previously been commanding the Majestic-class Heavy Cruiser *Last Light*, but had been forced to switch commands with Nadrin, giving him control of a much smaller and less powerful ship. The fact that his rivals on the *Nighthawk* enjoyed an outwardly identical ship that sported so many extras only further irritated the Warlord, but there was very little he could do.

“We got the message from Sergeant Ortega-Inahj. I’ll assume that she made a breakthrough, as I haven’t heard anything unusual,” Riverche began as the team took their seats.

“The breakthrough was more a realisation that we haven’t got the full story from the DIA. We’re going to be needing the *Fall* for this one. It turns out the Agency operate a network of spy satellites nearby to each of the Clan and House systems. These networks are not set to automatically transmit what they have intercepted in an attempt to avoid detection. The drawback of that is that we’re now going to have to travel to each system and gather the data ourselves.” Andrelious explained, operating a small tactical map to help illustrate his point.

“That will take WEEKS!” an accented voice called from somewhere near the back. Mimosa-Inahj identified it as Grakkar Quicklim, a recently Knighted Mon Calamari who had served as the team’s slicer until Saskia’s return. Since being removed from that role he had been retraining as a sniper, but most within the team felt that he lacked the patience for such a job.

“Stifle it, Quicklim! You may have gained your Knighthood, but your place in this team depends on this mission! Your performance simply hasn’t been up to the standard that befits the Soulfire Strike Team,” Andrelious snapped.

“He does have a point. The other Clan systems aren’t all nearby,” Wes replied.

“And we don’t have the time. We’ll be needed on Nicht Ka. Andrelious and Nadrin are pretty much Galeres’ entire front line, once you remove Cethgus.” Riverche added.

“Alright, look, Nadrin, can the DIA help us at all here? I’d imagine that they want to discover this traitor too, having lost at least one agent. Can you use your sway there to get us a little help?” Andrelious asked.

“The whole fleet’s headed to Nicht Ka. It’s not a question of getting the men, it’s a question of getting them *TO* the satellites. We may be able to get one or two stations checked, so I suggest we take an educated gamble as to which we’re going to check ourselves, and to which we can send Operatives to,” the Erinos replied.

Andrelious studied the galactic map carefully. He had travelled to many corners of the galaxy, from worlds as diverse as Byss, Corellia and Cirrus, long before even finding the Brotherhood. He was not, however, overly familiar with the locations of the systems that belonged to Arcona’s fellow Clans and Houses. He had visited Yridia once during the Horizons crisis, and had taken part in the invasion of New Tython, so he had an idea where the Tarentum and Odan-Urr home systems were, but only a vague idea for the others.

“Right. As I see it, we could cover Cocytus, Kr’tal and Yridia. They’re all in roughly the same direction, and that’s three out of six. If we send a DIA team to Orian, and another to New Tython, we’ll cover quite a few bases,” the ex-Imperial instructed.

“New Tython? Would the Jedi really be involved with this?” Nadrin queried.

“Right now, I’m not ruling anyone or anything out of this situation. Besides, it wasn’t so long ago that we had a Jedi running our Shadow Academy. Other members of the Council have current or former Urrites working in their staff.” Andrelious stated, watching the remainder of the fleet through a nearby transparisteel window. As he and his team watched, their fellow Arconans disappeared into hyperspace, on their way to Nicht Ka.

**Bridge**

**Agave-Class Picket *Valour’s Fall***

**Outer Cocytus System**

“Data’s in, Captain.” Lieutenant Rectar Leixpic announced, quickly pouring through the large amount of information that the DIA’s satellite had intercepted during House Scholae Palatinae’s communications.

“Anything of interest, Nadrin?” Andrelious asked, trying himself to discern the seemingly random data on the monitors in front of him.

Nadrin and Leixpic tapped furiously away their keyboards, separating and collating the information into a more readable format. As expected, the majority was encrypted, frustrating the efforts of the duo.

“Saskia! We need you to do something about these encryptions!” Mimosa-Inahj barked, almost making his daughter jump in the process.

“Just show me the codes and I’ll be in shortly. These *or’dinii* will use a simple code,” the Archpriestess answered. Andrelious frowned at the use of Mando’a, especially from his own blood, but said nothing. Instead, he reached over Leixpic’s shoulder and pushing the button that would send the data over to his Sergeant’s datapad.

“I expect results in ten minutes. We’re already missing the action!” the former Imperial called, storming off the bridge.

**Armoured Interface Craft-4 DN-001**

**Descent to Nicht Ka**

As the large landing craft broke into the atmosphere of Nicht Ka, Dark Forge began to steel themselves. Lexiconus began counting down the seconds to touchdown, while Meleu went over the plans with Ood and K’tana.

In the cockpit, the ship’s pilot began to power down the ship’s systems. He noticed an anti-aircraft gun in the vicinity of the landing zone, but also recognised it as the design used by the Brotherhood. He smiled to himself. That meant the landing area would be easy. Too many times had Dark Forge been required to land among hostiles.

“Five seconds to landing. Be ready.” Lexiconus stated.

**Dark Forge Landing Area**

**Nicht Ka Surface**

“Fire, Sergeant!” Lieutenant Grelpos ordered, noticing the Arconan vessel making its final preparations to land. The Lieutenant had proven himself as an expert in timing anti-aircraft fire against landing craft almost perfectly, waiting for the exact moment for the ship’s shields to be deactivated for maximum effect.

The Sergeant manning the gun pushed the fire button three times. The ground shook as the large turret spat plasma directly at the Dark Forge ship. Moments later, the nearby area rained with pieces of molten durasteel.

The traitorous Lieutenant smirked. His mission was a success. Dark Forge had been eliminated.

“Grelpos to command. Scratch one Arconan team.”

**Soulfire Ready Room**

**Agave-class Picket *Valour’s Fall***

**Hyperspace**

“I hope that you had good reason to disrupt the mission, Atyiru. Saskia is close to making a breakthrough.” Andrelious said. His Aedile had demanded his attention for another issue, something that had apparently been relayed to her just moments before the *Valour’s Fall* had entered hyperspace.

“Andrel, Dark Forge was blown out of the sky while attempting to land on Nicht Ka,” the Miraluka stated gravely.

“We’re at war. I’m surprised you were even told about this. We normally only get a summary of who we’ve lost *AFTER* the event.” Mimosa-Inahj replied.

“I was told this because they were killed by our own side. By Brotherhood men!” Atyiru wailed, deeply upset by the news.

“Alright. So we’re down Dark Forge. Do we know anything else about how things are going?”

“Yes. Andrel… Cethgus was with them,” the Krath continued with a slight tremor.

The ex-Imperial immediately clenched his fist in delight at hearing that his long term rival had been eliminated. Seconds later, he remembered who he was talking to, and stopped. He started to wonder exactly what to say.

“I don’t suggest we tell the others. Not about Cethgus, anyway. I know to a lot of you he’s an inspirational figure, so I don’t need the morale hit such an event would cause. You’re going have to be strong, too. I’ll imagine that you’re now de facto Quaestor. Again, we’ll keep that quiet for now,” Andrelious said, his tone one of concern for his friend, rather than of loss for his Quaestor.

Atyiru slammed her fist down hard on the table. “You don’t suggest? You’re not above me anymore, Andrelious! Why wouldn’t you want people to know that the bringer of death, as you so often described him, is dead!? If you’re so right about him, that would be actually *IMPROVE* morale!” she roared with a ferocity that the Warlord had never seen in the Aedile before.

“I’m just saying that such news won’t-“ the ex-Rollmaster began to reply, but he found himself silenced as the female jumped up to her feet, her superior height allowing her to tower over the diminutive Soulfire Captain.

“Don’t you worry, though. At least we know Kooki will be safe down there. After all, you always said the only threat to her was my brother. And now he’s gone,” the Archpriestess continued icily, before storming out of the room.

-x-

“Yes, that’s what she told me. Dark Forge and Cethgus were destroyed. Now, don’t tell the others. They don’t all necessarily share our vision of a new Galeres.” Andrelious stated. His daughter had arrived in the ready room shortly after Atyiru’s angry tirade, and had enquired as to why her fellow Archpriestess had been so furious.

“Leave her to stew, Dad. She’ll be fine. I’ve got the information you wanted. I’m not exactly thrilled to be sharing it with someone other than Celevon, but I’ve already spoken to him. He suggested I share the information with you, as well,” the younger Inahj replied.

“You contacted Edraven during a hyperjump?” the Warlord snapped, but pushed the matter aside. “Anyway, what did you find? Anything useful?” the Warlord asked anxiously.

“Yes. There’s a message to the traitor from a member of Scholae. Whoever it is has a Praetor in the Imperial House,” Saskia explained matter of factly. “Here..”

*Lord,*

*For security I am having Agent Osk-Aurek-Resh send you the final communiques, but we in Scholae are about to head to Nicht Ka. Osk-Aurek-Resh is, as you know, operating from Yridian space. He will be relaying you Tarentum’s battle plan, as well as any others he is able to lay his hands on. Lord Esoteric will be delighted to get a jump on our so-called friends.*

*As for why I’m asking Osk-Aurek-Resh to do my ‘dirty work’? If he’s caught, it’ll be up to me as your Praetor to make sure our work remains uncompromised.*

*Your Servant*

*Agent Esk-Trill*

“Excellent work. There are only two Councillors with Praetors in Scholae. Valhavoc and Aabsdu. Both of them have staff in every system, so we can’t rule either of them out at this stage. At least we’re finally getting somewhere. You go and have a rest. Tell the rest of the team to as well. It’ll be a day or two before we reach Yridia. Damn Tarenti put their system so far from the rest of the Brotherhood.” Andrelious instructed.

Saskia simply nodded, leaving the Ready Room. Andrelious followed a few moments later, heading for his own quarters.

**One Sith Operating Base**

**Nicht Ka**

“Your friend on the Brotherhood’s council has sent us detailed plans, Lord Esoteric. We have information on the movements of House Tarentum, but what will interest you is we also have Arcona’s battle plan,” a One Sith Acolyte declared, handing a datapad to the armour clad Sith Lord.

“Excellent. And have we put things into motion?” Esoteric queried.

“Everybody knows what they must do. One other thing, my Lord. It seems your inside man had a gun emplacement from the Brotherhood’s own arsenal shoot down an Arconan Transport. From what I heard, quite a few Dark Jedi were killed,” the younger Sith explained.

“Anyone of consequence?”

The Acolyte smiled “Apparently, my Lord, the Quaestor of Galeres was on board. Cethgus Tiberius Entar Arconae is dead. Arcona will be in disarray for some time, but we cannot find record of where his Aedile, Atyiru, has gone. She’d logically be the next choice, but what’s left of Galeres is currently being marshalled by Captain Arcia Cortel.”

Esoteric chuckled. “Good. Finally we’re getting some ground against the Brotherhood. Have the agent who brought us this information rewarded. Today will be the day we turn this around.”

**Bridge**

**Agave-Class Picket *Valour’s Fall***

**3 days later**

With Tarentum’s forces having departed for Nicht Ka, the *Valour’s Fall* had found little trouble in acquiring the information from the DIA’s satellite. Nadrin and Leixpic had gone through the information in record time, spurred on by the will to avenge Cethgus’ fate. The last few days had been difficult for Soulfire. Atyiru was being incredibly cold and pushy, especially towards Andrelious.

“I want the data ready in five minutes, Saskia!” the Miraluka Aedile snapped.

“Give her time, Atyiru. We need to make sure we have concrete evidence before we go after anyone. Marick won’t like us hurting Tarenti as it is.” Andrelious replied, trying to keep calm. His relationship with his Aedile had been severely tested as she continued to grieve for her ‘brother’. To her credit, she had managed to hide the worst of her breakdowns from the rest of the team, but had given Andrelious several tongue lashings just for daring to speak to her.

“It wasn’t a request, Andrelious. And right now, Marick’s not here. So you do what *I* tell you,” Atyiru hissed.

*What in the name of Palpatine is happening to Atty? I just hope nobody gets injured with the way she is right now!* Andrelious thought.

“If you don’t watch yourself, it’ll be *YOU* on the operating table. Don’t push me!” the female spat, shaking a little with anger.

“Atyiru, I know that Cethgus and I did not enjoy a good relationship, but I’m not behind what happened. Right now we just need to get this information and find out exactly who Osk-Aurek-Resh is. Once we have his name, we’ll be able to move on and get some answers,” the Warlord answered, feeling his own anger building up.

“Half-way there!” Saskia interrupted.

“I suppose you’ll want to contact Edraven first again?” Andrelious asked.

“She won’t if she knows what’s good for her. I could easily have the pair of you charged with insubordination.” Atyiru snarled, beginning to pace impatiently around the bridge.

The comment was enough for Andrelious to snap. He reached for his lightsaber, activating it and pointing its crimson blade in the direction of the Galeres Aedile.

“You have your ideas of family, Atyiru, and I have mine. You may be nominally in charge, but Soulfire is my team. So back off and let us do it *OUR* way,” the ex-Imperial commanded.

“And I’m done! Now I can get off this bridge before you two destroy the place!” Saskia announced, quickly moving towards the turbolift.

“I think we’ll join you in the Ready Room. I’d like to check in with Edraven, and find out how Kooki’s doing.” Andrelious replied, returning his weapon to its belt clip.

-x-

Atyiru, Saskia and Andrelious all arrived in the Ready Room. They took the three seats nearest to the holoprojector, before noticing that Nadrin Erinos Arconae had followed them.

“What brings you here, Nadrin?” Andrelious questioned.

“Making sure you and Atyiru don’t bring down *haran*,” the Mandalorian replied simply.

“We’ll be fine, Nadrin. You’re welcome to stay if you like. I could do with backup in case your Captain decides to threaten me again,” Atyiru spat.

“Shall we get this done? Saskia, open a channel to Edraven,” the Soulfire Captain ordered, impatient to get things moving.

Saskia silently keyed in the commands required to reach the Arête leader. Seconds later, a shimmering hologram of Celevon appeared. It phased in and out a few times – the distance was a little further than the optimal range of the ship’s comm system.

“Can I help you?” the Prelate asked. “Things are getting quite fraught down here!”

“Saskia will of course only share her findings with you, Edraven. That, and I want to know how the rest of my family is. How are Kooki and the twins?” Andrelious asked nervously.

“Kooki is on board the *Shadow*. She’s acting as a coordinator for Quaestor Valtiere. The twins are probably asleep,” the Onderonian responded.

“Now we’ve that out of the way, I can tell you. We have a name for the one known as agent Osk-Resh-Aurek. Do any of you know Orion Aries Rial?” Saskia enquired.

“I can’t say I’ve met him. But, I’ll pass it on. Edraven out!” Celevon declared, cutting the communication off.

“That was a little abrupt. Shouldn’t we be telling him who the traitor on the Council is?” Nadrin wondered.

Andrelious frowned. “We wouldn’t even have contacted him at all if *somebody* would have given me the information straight out.”

“I just can’t trust anyone other than Celevon right now. How do I know any of you don’t work for the traitor? We’ve already lost the *or’dinii* in Dark Forge. Would you want Soulfire to fall too?” Saskia challenged, storming off before her father could reply.

-x-

Andrelious eventually found Saskia fiddling around the *Valour’s Fall* engine room with a hydrospanner.

“There. That should make the engines run a little more smoothly. The last hyperjump was a bit bumpy,” the Cirrian stated, noticing the Soulfire Captain.

“Never mind that now. What I want to know, is how do you know that this Rial person is Osk-Aurek-Resh?” Andrelious demanded.

“During our jump, I did a little detective work. Tarentum’s roll is of course available to us through the Estle-Eden axis, so I went through and listed anyone who worked for Aabsdu or Valhavoc. Rial is one of Aabsdu’s Magistrates, for a start. Then you’ve got the obvious clue that his initials match up with his agent name. And, the real clincher? He used Mando’a terms in his message. Rial, or Enapace as he was once known, is the only Mando’a speaker in House Tarentum. That’s pretty damning evidence.” Saskia responded coolly.

The elder Human nodded. “It’s enough of a lead for my liking. Plus he’s only a Dark Jedi Knight. I didn’t really want to have start interrogating Equites. Good work.”

**War Room**

**Imperial-II Class Star Destroyer *Eye of the Abyss II***

**Nicht Ka Orbit**

“Have Arête cover the flank. Then bring in Apex Brigade. That should block the One Sith’s retreat!” Marick ordered.

“Marick, are you sure? They’ve second-guessed everything else we’ve tried. I just don’t understand how they’re doing it, given Taldryan seem to be routing them,” Legorii observed, frowning at the tactical display.

“That’ll be because the One Sith know our tactics, Marick.” Andrelious interrupted, his hologram having materialised without either Consul or Proconsul noticing.

“About time you checked in. Have you found out who the traitor is, yet?” Legorii questioned.

“Yes. The traitor is the Master-At-Arms. I’m heading to Nicht Ka now. If you could locate one calling himself Orion Aries Rial, I’d very much like to speak to him regarding this. And remember, that bastard is responsible for what happened to Dark Forge!” the Warlord replied.

“You better be right about this. It’ll cause waves with the Estle-Eden axis.” Marick stated coolly, clearly irritated deep underneath his controlled exterior at the idea of the aggressive Mimosa-Inahj going after Tarenti Journeymen.

The holographic Andrelious fizzled back out of existence, adding nothing further to the conversation.

“All units. Look out for Dark Jedi Knight Orion Aries Rial. We need to speak with him with regarding joint strategy.” Marick commanded.

**Surface of Nicht Ka**

One Sith aligned vehicles continued to bombard the Arconan position. The organisation had not had much luck against the Shadow Clan, but things had been different on Nicht Ka. Already it appeared that House Galeres had been almost completely obliterated. Cethgus was a known casualty, while no One Sith operative had seen Atyiru at all during the battle. That had left them a little confused as to exactly who was leading the Galerean portion of Arcona’s forces, but that had not mattered as they cut deeper into the Arconans. Reports from elsewhere, too, indicated that other One Sith units were faring better this time around, and that the battle for Nicht Ka was not going to be the foregone conclusion that had occurred before.

Celevon Edraven arced his lightsaber around a One Sith’s own blade, plunging his weapon into his enemy’s chest. The Iridonian screamed in agony and fell to the ground, while the Arête Leader simply moved on to another opponent, waving his team members onward. All of Arête were present on the battlefield, aside from Kooki who had been allowed to help the Qel-Droman Quaestor coordinate things, mostly to allow her to remain close to her daughters. For the rest of the usually isolated team, however, the fight had gone on for several days with few chances to rest.

**War Room**

**Bothan Assault Cruiser *Shadow***

**Nicht Ka Orbit**

The war room of the Qel-Droman flagship was frantic as Nikola Valtiere expertly manoeuvered the men and women under his command. On hearing that his favoured tactics were now common knowledge among the One Sith commanders, it had not taken the Battlemaster too long to adapt, but he had seen far more losses than he was used to.

However, the news that Rial had been convinced to head to the *Shadow* was a welcome boost. Valtiere had not wasted any time in informing his Aedile, Turel, or his temporary attaché, Kooki, about the traitorous Tarenti’s role in the bigger picture. Neither the ex-Urrite nor the female Knight felt the same sense of loss that Valtiere did, but had quickly promised that they would do all that they could to ensure that Rial paid for his part in what he had done.

“Knight Mimosa-Inahj. I need you to head down to the hangar and welcome our visitor. Do not tell him why he’s been summoned to the *Shadow*,” the Quaestor demanded.

“As if I’d be that daft. I’m a little more subtle than my husband!” the Arêtian responded, leaving.

-x-

On arrival in the hangar, Kooki was saluted by the two troopers guarding the hangar area from boardings.

“He’s over there, ma’am. We’ll provide cover if necessary,” the slighter older looking soldier stated.

“I don’t have any intention of needing cover. Besides, just because I’m a new mother doesn’t mean I’ve forgotten how to use my lightsaber.” Kooki answered crossly.

As the Alderaanian approached Rial, the magcon field hissed slightly, indicating another ship was about to pass through and land.

“Greetings, Knight Rial. Welcome to the Cruiser *Shadow*. If you’d like to follow me, I’ll escort you to the Quaestor’s office. He’ll be ready to see you shortly,” Kooki began, offering her hand to the Mandalorian.

Rial quickly shook hands with the female, before following her into the corridors of the *Shadow*. As he disappeared around a corner, a small shuttle landed. The two troopers readied their blasters, knowing that they could not even trust the Arconan markings on the shuttle’s fuselage.

The hatch of the shuttle hissed open and the troopers did not move a muscle, both focusing on attacking any hostile that may emerge from inside the docked ship. They noticed a small figure, robed in black, followed by several other faces that were not too familiar on the Qel-Droman flagship.

“Shadeborn Mimosa-Inahj, SIR!” one announced, saluting as he recognised the Soulfire leader.

“At ease, Private. Tell me where Rial is,” the Warlord ordered, wasting no time with pleasantries.

“Your wife is escorting him to the Quaestor’s personal office, sir. He doesn’t know he’s been found out, yet.”

Andrelious frowned.

“Get after them! Kooki’s in danger!” he yelled.

-x-

“So have you met my husband, Andrelious? He’s told me he’s fought alongside Tarenti before. He’s said you’re all good men,” Kooki questioned as she led Orion Aries Rial through the corridors of the *Shadow*.

*All good men. Except you. I know what you’re about to do, you slimy bastard. And I’m ready.*

“You don’t talk much, do you?” the Qel-Droman continued, annoyed at her fellow Knight’s lack of communication. Moments later, Kooki heard a familiar *snap-hiss*, and turned to see Rial armed with his lightsaber. He pointed his crimson blade directly at the female’s torso.

“Kookimarissia Mimosa-Inahj. New mother. You’re an easy target!” Rial cried, swinging his weapon back. Kooki quickly grabbed and activated her own lightsaber, its amethyst blade easily parrying the Tarenti’s attack.

“Your frakking records are inaccurate, Rial! Don’t they say anything about lightsaber specialist?” the Alderaanian hissed, blocking another aggressive slash.

“Rial! Step away from my wife and stand down. In the name of Clan Arcona, you are under arrest!” Andrelious bellowed, sprinting in. Soulfire and Atyiru followed in hot pursuit, some armed with their lightsabers, others with blasters.

“What my *subordinate* there means to say, is that if you surrender now, we’ll guarantee you a fair trial. Stand down, Andrelious. I’m sure he’ll come without a fight.” Atyiru interjected.

“So. You were with Soulfire. No wonder our men couldn’t find you. Still, it didn’t help Dark Forge. Or Cethgus,” the Tarenti spat.

“One last chance, Rial. Hand your lightsaber to Kooki and come with us. We have a few questions for you.” Andrelious ordered. Soulfire dutifully moved into position to support their Captain, blocking Rial’s escape routes with ease.

The Obelisk deactivated his weapon with little pause for thought, handing it to the black and purple haired woman. Kooki smiled at Andrelious, then at Atyiru.

“I’m glad to see you both made it back,” she said, walking up to her husband and wrapping her arms tightly around him. The Soulfire Captain returned the loving embrace, stroking Kooki’s hair gently.

“Andrelious. You can see you wife later. You’ve got a job to do. And I’m sure so does Kooki.” Atyiru said, though she too gave Kooki a quick hug.

**Executor-class Star Dreadnaught *Suffering***

**Nicht Ka Orbit**

Aabsdu was growing increasingly worried. Agent Osk-Aurek-Resh had not checked in for some time. Whilst he had managed to acquire the battle plans for Tarentum and Arcona, he had vanished from the comms about an hour previously.

The bridge of the *Suffering* had over the last few months been filled with agents loyal to Aabsdu’s goals, rather than to those of the Brotherhood. With the Grand Master and his Deputy having elected to join the fight on the surface, the Master-At-Arms was for once able to exercise his authority over the fleet without the watchful eye of his Sith Lord superiors.

“Lieutenant Fex’ak, if we don’t hear from Agent Osk-Aurek-Resh in the next hour, I want you to perform a Base-Delta-Zero operation on the planet. Leave nobody alive!” the Di Plagia commanded.

“Sir, that would eliminate both Brotherhood and One Sith units. I advise we find a different-” the Twi’lek weapons officer replied.

“Do as I say! We’ve all come too far for this to fall apart now.” Aabsdu yelled.

**Interrogation Room Aurek**

**Bothan Assault Cruiser *Shadow***

**Nicht Ka Orbit**

“It’s a shame that Miss Voth and the *Nighthawk* are not available right now. I’d love to see what she would do to this little bastard.” Andrelious stated as Nadrin strapped Rial onto a large durasteel slab. The Tarenti had been relieved of the majority of his armour, leaving him in little more than a thin vest and a pair of shorts. The Soulfire Captain had ordered that the room be made as cold as the environmental controls allowed, leaving the traitorous Knight shivering.

“Andrelious, I’m warning you: no torture. You’re already pushing your luck by having the man freeze half to death!” Atyiru hissed, fastening a cloak around herself to keep the bitter coldness out.

“I’m not going to touch him, Atyiru. I’m leaving that honour to Nadrin. Remember that he lost a fellow Arconae today.” Mimosa-Inahj replied.

“If *any* Soulfire member harms him, I’ll have you court martialed and it will be *YOU* facing Nath’s techniques!” the Aedile warned, holding her arm out to stop Nadrin from advancing on the captured Rial.

“This isn’t your ship, Atyiru. You may be acting Quaestor of Galeres now, but we’re in Qel-Droman territory right now. Why do you think I made sure he was sent here? I knew that your conscience would get in the way if were on the *Darkest Night*,” Andrelious stated coldly.

“My orders are my orders. That would be the case if we were on a *TALDRYAN* ship! I’m starting to see why they shoved you into Rollmaster. You’re just so frakking unreasonable.” Atyiru answered, feeling her hand moving to her lightsaber.

A hologram of Marick Arconae appeared between the feuding Galereans.

“Atyiru, Andrelious. Have you got results, yet?” the Consul asked.

“No, we have not. I can’t even get started because Miss Morality won’t let me use torture.” Andrelious snapped.

“Then find other ways. She is your Quaestor now. This situation isn’t easy for any of us, Andrelious. We’ve all just lost our brother in arms, as well as some of our most promising Journeymen and Equites. I don’t want to see what’s left of Galeres’ leadership tear into each other.” Marick replied.

“Fine. But don’t come back to me when I can’t tell you what the rest of Aabsdu’s plan is. How are things going on the surface?” the ex-Imperial queried.

Marick almost frowned. “We’ve lost a lot more to the One Sith this time. Dark Forge were eliminated, as you know, and the general Galeres membership has been all but obliterated without a qualified leader on the field. The *Nighthawk*’s had to withdraw as it’s taken too much damage. Qel-Droma aren’t fairing much better. Apex Brigade are down to their last two or three members, but Arête haven’t lost anyone yet. All in all, it’ll be tough to recover from this one. So just do as Atyiru tells you and you will be fine.”

Andrelious sighed as the hologram deactivated.

“Alright, Atyiru, how are we going to proceed here?” he questioned.

“If you give me a few more minutes, dad, I’ll at least have all his communications with Aabsdu for you. That may help us,” Saskia chimed in, not looking up from Rial’s datapad. The Cirrian was busy slicing through its encryptions, a task that she was finding a little harder than she had expected.

“You work on that. Andrelious, you charge Rial with his crimes and we’ll get him back to Dajorra for his trial. His *fair* trial.” Atyiru ordered.

“You really don’t know how war works, do you? This man is an enemy. He nearly took Kooki out! How would you like to have to tell Poppy and Etty that their mother was dead? For that alone he deserves to be ejected with the rest of the garbage!” Andrelious bellowed.

“Charge him. Take him to the cells. That’s an order, Captain Inahj. He goes to the cells, or you go to the cells. Your call,” the Miraluka threatened.

Andrelious moved his right hand in the general direction of his lightsaber. Atyiru mirrored the action, but stopped when she heard the Warlord taking a large swig of Corellian Brandy from his hipflask.

“Knight Orion Aries Rial, you are charged with treason, dereliction of duty and abuse of power. You will be taken to Dajorra for your trial. However, this being a war situation, I am invoking my right to treat you as a captured enemy, thereby allowing me to extract information from you in any way seen fit by the senior Arconan. Better, Atyiru?”

“You may ask him one question, Andrelious. And no weapons or instruments of torture,” the Krath replied.

“Very well. Rial. I want you tell me why you and Aabsdu are doing this. Tell me what the One Sith are offering the Master At Arms and his staff to do this to the Brotherhood. Tell me now,” Andrelious demanded, wielding the Force to strip away any attempt Rial could make to resist answering.

“I’ll tell you why, but first, let me warn you. If I don’t get into contact with the Master At Arms soon, his men will bombard the entire of Nicht Ka with the flagship. Powerful things, those Executor-class ships, as you’d know,” the Tarenti stated.

“Don’t give me that. Aabsdu doesn’t have enough control over the *Suffering* to do that. Most of the men serving there are veterans from Korras’ time.”

Rial smirked. “Why do you think he changed all the staff when Kalen left? Besides, Malik would have told his fellow Son of Sadow, the Grand Master, everything. He had to be sure that nobody would suspect him.”

Andrelious began to realise the severity of the situation. The Brotherhood’s flagship was under the control of a man who had other interests at heart. Once the *Suffering* started to fire on the surface of Nicht Ka, it would take a large effort from the remainder of the Iron Throne’s Navy to stop it and likely leave the Brotherhood’s military, as well as that of the Clans and Houses, in tatters.

“I’d better warn Valtiere about what’s happening! This *osik* got real!” Nadrin declared, sprinting out of the interrogation room.

“And now I shall tell you exactly why we’re doing this. Aabsdu has been an agent of the One Sith for a very long time. Ever since the existence of the Brotherhood was discovered, he’s been undercover, reporting back to Krayt, and more recently, Esoteric. Evant, Teylas and I are merely those that he has swayed to the side of the One Sith as time has gone on. We all have our own reasons for following him. Mine? He promised me I could be Quaestor of what’s left of Tarentum when the dust clears. Not that there’s going to be much left now that you’ve captured me,” Rial explained, his mind still opened by Andrelious’ mastery of the Force.

“Thank you, Knight Rial. Now, by the power vested in me according to the Arconan Articles of War, I am going to deliver your punishment for your crimes,” the Warlord hissed.

Andrelious grabbed his black hilted lightsaber, the one he used only to bring death. With a single, deliberate movement, he separated the traitor’s head from its body, turning to Atyiru moments later.

“Better? No torture, and I gave him a quick death. Now let’s *finally* get down to Nicht Ka. From what Marick said, Soulfire are needed down there.”

To the Miraluka’s surprise, Andrelious placed his hand softly on her shoulder.

“I know, Atty. We’ve all lost a lot thanks to this mess. But now the end is in sight. Once the Grand Master is informed as to Aabsdu’s plans, he’ll be able to shut the (flagship) down remotely. The deaths will soon be at an end, I promise. And then you and I can rebuild what’s left of Galeres,” he said as gently as he could manage.

“Thank you, Andrel. Just give me a little time. Coordinate with Arcia once we get back and I’ll sort something out after I’ve had a while to recover,” Atyiru replied.

Saskia looked up.

“Does this mean you don’t need all these messages?” she asked.

*FIN*