Xen’Mordin Vismorsus

Scholae Palatinae

The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing

**Judecca**

**Cocytus system**

**38 ABY**

**2 Days Ago**

The sunset cast the sky in deep hues of reds and orange. The air around the capital city of Ohmen was cool and crisp. The shadows of the mountain walls that housed the city did not harbor anything more than the honest efforts of good people enjoying the fall festivities. For the citizens of the city, it was another quiet night of safety and peace. The strong arm of the Empire keep the order, and in return, for tonight at least, it’s citizens gave back in loyal submission. Another festival, celebrating one of the many holidays the Empire held so highly, caused the city to be crowded, buzzing with content life.

And Xen’Mordin was missing all of it.

“You know, we brought in thirty-seven different kinds of cheeses for this festival. Even some rare Chandrila Taleggio. Do you know how difficult it is to get that? It goes excellent with some of our local Pinot Noirs,” Xen said, mainly to himself. The man hanging by his hands from the ceiling obviously didn’t care for wine. Or cheese. And he probably didn’t even care for the great deal of work that went into planning such a lovely distraction festival. After all, a happy people, are a docile people. Xen shook his head *tutting* to himself as he started to wander around the edges of the surprisingly spacious dungeon room. He rhythmically slapped a long skinny black rod in his hand.

“Did we get those belly dancers from Lyon for this one?” Evant questioned. He was calmly leaning against the wall directly opposite from where their little guest was hanging from.

“Nah, but we got those fire breathers,” Xen replied. He calming raised the long rod in his hand and poked it under their guest’s ribcage.

A high pitched scream echoed through the room.

“Well, at least we get to enjoy some music,” Xen continued after letting his hand fall back to his side. He smiled, something Evant was well aware of, even though the Quaestor’s face was masked behind his oft worn mask.

“Plea… Please, you… Hafta believe me,” Their guest managed to gasp out after several seconds.

“I don’t have to believe anything. I *do* have to know who sent you to snoop around our encrypted military plans. Was it Zhan?” Xen pried, once again poking the black rod into their guest’s ribcage. He longed for the knowledge of channeled lightning to remove the need for the object, but until his power was at that level, it gave the results he needed. There was a great deal more screaming. Xen stepped back again.

“Zha, Zhan? Who is Zhan? I am just a technician checking our systems. Please, please stop this, I was just doing my job!”

Xen poked him again, dragging the tip of the rod down the mans ribcage and into his gut. Xen could see the muscles spasming. Xen leaned in close to the man’s head.

“If you are a technician, why is there no record of you in our system until just two weeks ago? You are a saboteur and very much pushing me to the edges of my patience.”

 “I… I… I was sent from Antei! Checks on all Brotherhood encryption systems. They wanted to keep it under the radar to see how you are really running it!”

Evant arched an eyebrow, skeptical at the thought of someone from the Council sending someone covertly to check their systems.

“We’ve never had a spot check like this before. You were snooping where you definitely don’t belong,” The Aedile said. Xen nodded in agreement and poked the man again.

“Its the truth! On my life, it is the truth.”

“Who gave the orders?” Xen asked.

“I was just doing what my superiors told me. One of them must have gotten the order from the Council!” The man was shaking, even without the rod touching him. His lips were trembling. They had broken him down. Xen was a bit disappointed the Council couldn’t even send someone with basic anti-interrogation training.

“Something *feels,* off about this,” Xen said to Evant. Evant nodded in agreement. Xen placed the rod back down on the table. The man hanging from the ceiling let out a loud sigh of relief and started sobbing.

“Thank you, thank you for stopping.”

Xen grabbed a small knife and turned quickly, stabbing the man in the chest. There was a small spurt of blood as Xen stepped back and placed the knife on the tray. The man stared wide eyed down at his chest. His body was already in so much pain, he didn’t even process that he had been stabbed, just a slow trickle of blood. He looked up and tried to make eye contact through Xen’s mask.

“Wha?”

Evant opened the cell door and stepped out. Xen quickly followed. He pointed to one of the guards then pointed with his thumb back over his shoulder.

“He should drown in his own blood fairly quickly. Drop the body in the incinerator after its done. Get the cleaning crew to clean up whatever mess is left.” The guard nodded, gave a quick salute and stepped inside the cell.

“I know the Council likes to keep us on our toes? But this, this doesn’t fit. Given our push against the One Sith, it is an odd time to be changing the rules on us,” Evant said as the two men walked down the hall toward the lift.

“We will have to keep our eyes open on this as well. Too many variables. It is getting increasingly difficult to keep this Empire secure,” Xen replied.

“It has survived worse,” Evant said. Xen nodded.

“And it will continue to survive this.”

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**Antei**

**Antei system**

**38 ABY**

**5 hours ago**

The *Lambda*-class shuttle shook ever so slightly as it broke through the atmosphere of Antei. The first few journeys through the shroud and into the homeworld of the Brotherhood had left Xen’Mordin with a pit of anxiety in his stomach. These days however, it was so routine he might as well be landing back on one of the planets of the Cocytus system. His years as Quaestor of Scholae Palatinae had required many a visit to this planet of dark energy.

“Where the hell is Nicht Ka? That doesn’t even sound like a real planet,” one of the accompanying guards whispered in discussion.

Xen sitting securely was deep enough in thought not to rebuke the soldier, but a small part of him did agree with the sentiment. The orders had just came in from the Master At Arms that this was the final push before Korriban. Those orders had already been relayed back to the rest of units in their home systems. Luckily Evant knew what to do, and the fleet would be prepared to leave the instant Xen returned from this business trip to the Council.

Xen suddenly found himself being pressed tightly into his seat, the shuttle was climbing and fast. The Sith quickly slammed a hand out, hitting a button to open comm channels to the pilot.

“What is happening? Why are we not continuing to the surface?” He barked out quickly. The less he had to speak the better, as his stomach was doing barrel rolls of the sudden change in trajectory.

“We picked up something on scanners sir. It was an explosion.”

*An attack on Antei? Impossible.* Xen thought quickly.

“How big?”

“Not very, but enough to take out a small shuttle or transport. We are waving off until we have clearance from ground control to land.”

*So small… That is a targeted attack. Who could they possibly think they could kill with a simple missile strike? No one on the council is so easily dispatched.*

Xen sat in silence for several more moments, mind racing at the possibilities of a targeted strike against a member of the Dark Council, here deep in the shroud. Antei was too well hidden and defended to kill a council member on its surface. The memories of the confession two days prior on Judecca bubbled up in the back of Xen’s mind. The hairs of his neck stood tall.

*The Council has been infiltrated. We’ve been played.* Xen made his choice very quickly then.

“Lyspair. Take me to the Academy. I need to visit an old *friend,*” he commanded. A few seconds later the shuttle banked and changed trajectory toward Antei’s smaller moon.

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**Lyspair**

**Antei System**

**38 ABY**

**4 hours ago**

Ood Bnar, Praetor to the Headmaster, hummed rather loudly and off key to himself as he walked down the seemingly empty corridor of the Academy. It had been another busy day of preparing new and devious ways to break down and train the new recruits before sending them off to their new homes in the different units of the Brotherhood. Lost in thought, and secure in knowing none of the new members of the academy posed a threat to a Pontifex such as himself, his guard was down. Before he was even aware he wasn’t alone in the hallway, he was drenched.

Ood spat some of the liquid that had run into his mouth out and blinked hard.

“This is not an amusing pra… Is this gasoline? It tastes like gasoline,” Ood said.

“I don’t think I want to know how you know what gasoline tastes like. Seems like a dangerous substance to be around, when you are made largely of wood,” Xen said standing behind the Neti. Ood squinted and then his eyes went wide at the recognition of Xen’s voice.

“I know we use to joke about it, but setting me on fire just isn’t all that funny, Xen. You should treat me better, where would you be without me?” Ood said, turning on the spot. Xen smiled behind his mask and casually held up a lighter and started flicking it on and off. Ood started to take a few steps back.

“I would be several months longer as Emperor, and would have been spared a great many headaches cleaning up your messes. Though I suppose I should thank you for the fun I had over throwing you. It was a beautiful thing to see executed so flawlessly,” Xen retorted. Ood remained silent, watching as Xen continued to flick the lighter on and off.

“I know what you are thinking, small thing a lighter, easy enough to push out of the way with the force. But lets be honest, a quick *spark* is all it needs. But that isn’t why I’m here. I just needed your undivided attention, and we really don’t have time for power plays over information. The Brotherhood is at risk.”

Ood’s eyes widened again.

“We are always at risk, its the nature of what we are,” he said flatly. The Neti’s eyes never left focus on the lighter.

“But from a Council member?” Xen asked. Ood’s eyes shot up to the dark holes that were the eyepieces of Xen’s mask.

“Ah yes, now that does get you thinking doesn’t. I need access to files on everyone. And I mean *everyone,*” Xen continued. Ood nodded and nodded with his head.

“My office is this way,” he said. Xen pocketed the lighter and fell into step along side the Praetor.

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**Lyspair**

**Antei System**

**38 ABY**

**1 hour ago**

“This has to be a mistake,” Ood protested. Once the two had started looking, it didn’t take long for the pieces to fall into place. Coded orders, sealed files, overridden commands. It was all there in plain sight, just no one had been looking.

“Who else could do this Ood? Who else has that kind of autonomous control?” Xen posed. They had run over all the files for a third time, all pointing to the same conclusion. There was most certainly a traitor on the Council.

“We have to tell the others,” Ood began.

“My shuttle is already prepped, I don’t care what he has going on, Muz is going to see me. Now,” Xen finished. He pushed a few buttons and transferred all the data they had collected to his personal datapad. Both stood up from their hunched positions at the table. Xen shot Ood a quizzical look, not that Ood could see it.

“You need to stay here. I have this,” Xen said.

“Won’t it make more sense for us both to go to the Grandmaster?”

“You have One Sith agents inside this very building. I think you have more pressing things to tend to.”

The Neti nodded and went back to his seat. Xen turned and walked briskly for the office door. As it slid open he paused and turned back.

“Thank you for quickly jumping on board with this. But don’t think it changes anything. You failed the Empire, and wounded it. Then you abandoned it. I will watch you burn someday.”

And with that he strode from the office, and walked briskly to the hanger. There was only one person he knew that could deal with this threat.

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**Antei**

**Antei system**

**38 ABY**

**Now**

Xen’Mordin stood in silence. Just has he had been standing in silence for several minutes now. Before him sat the Lion of Tarthos himself, Grandmaster Muz Ashen. The Grandmaster’s brow was furrowed in an obvious stage of intense focus. Xen had presented him with the data, and had even begun a long explanation before a raised hand with a single raised index finger brought him to silence.

Muz shifted in his chair and brought his attention back to the Scholae Palatinaean Quaestor.

“So you have evidence the Justicar of the Brotherhood, is in allegiance with the One Sith.”

Xen nodded. The air of the room remained even stiller than the two men within it. Xen’s jaw clenched with anticipation. Of orders, of Muz’s infamous roaring, of a lockdown of Antei. But none of that came. All that came was silence and stillness.

“This is not news to me.”

Xen took a step back in surprise.

“But he is a traitor! We can’t just let him sit by and continue to und…” Xen began in protest, but was once again pulled silent by a gesture from Muz.

“Oh but we can. It is all part of the plan. Rest assured, when this is done, Taigikori Aybara will rue the day he was born. But not until it is the proper time.”

Muz gave a slight smile pausing while reflecting on whatever cruel fate awaited the Justicar.

“Now who else knows?” he asked.

“Ood, I went to him to help find some clues as to what was going on. He had clearance to see more areas than I did,” Xen replied. Muz nodded.

“I will send a message to him then. As for you, return to Judecca as if nothing happened. Send your fleet to Nicht Ka. And then we will march on to Korriban. If anyone asks, this meeting was yet another failed attempt to earn clan level of resources for Scholae Palatinae. Tell no one of the Justicar’s betrayal,” Muz commanded. Xen gulped hard, and gave a quick bow in deference to the Grandmaster, before retreating back to the hangar bay.

As Xen walked back to his shuttle, he opened a comm line to his men there.

“Its me. Send word to Evant I’m on my way back. I want the fleet ready to move when I arrive. And tell him to re-vet everyone with Security Clearance Esk-7 and above. As a precaution that is. We can never be too careful with the security of the Empire.”

Xen closed the comm and walked in silence, tense and alert. He buried what he knew deep inside himself. Secrets were no stranger to him. Yet, this one left a sour note in his mouth, one he couldn’t wait to be rid of.