**Detention Cell #7078**

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**39 ABY**

The detention level of the Arcona Citadel was not a nice place. Even its corridors were cold and dark, whilst the cells were even worse, especially, Andrelious had heard, in the winter months when things turned cold. The Warlord was fortunate in that regard; Estle City was currently experiencing its summer. That was little consolation, however – only at noon did the local star come even close to providing any light into his cell.

Andrelious had been in captivity since the attack on Korriban. Clan Arcona had won, but his own celebrations had been cut very short when agents from the Dajorra Intelligence Agency, including Arcia Cortel, the *Nighthawk* Captain and somebody who had become a rival to the Soulfire Leader, had thrown a spanner into the works.

**4 months earlier…**

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

**Orbit, Korriban**

The party atmosphere on board the Arcona flagship was incredibly infectious. Even the more dour members of the Shadow Clan, as well as those who had been affected by the large amount of casualties sustained in the recent successful battle, found themselves joining in with the festivities.

“Another beer!” Andrelious cheered, extending his arm out and catching the beverage as one of the service droids hurled it in his general direction. As he levered the bottle’s lid off and began to drink the Ebla Beer, the loud music being pumped into the room suddenly stopped.

“Who the frak turned that off?” Kordath asked, falling off a bar stool as he attempted to turn around to see what everyone else was already staring at: a serious looking Arcia Cortel, flanked by two armour clad members of the summit guard.

“Ah. Captain Cortel. Perhaps you actually *CAN* enjoy yourself,” the Soulfire Captain sneered. The two did not get on, despite their shared Imperial background. Arcia’s by-the-book nature had frequently clashed with Andrelious’ far more relaxed approach. An early clash when the *Nighthawk* had first been commissioned had just been the first in several fallings out between the pair. The dispute had never quite come to blows, though this was largely thanks to the calming influence of their mutual friend and Aedile, Atyiru.

The Exarch’s serious expression was unmoved. “Save it. You’re under arrest, Mimosa-Inahj. Your gross negligence on the surface of Korriban led to the capture of Nadrin Erinos Arconae. I suggest you come quietly.”

“Excuse me? How in the name of Palpatine have you come to that conclusion, Cortel? Your accusation is simply preposterous.” Andrelious responded, instinctively moving his hand to his lightsaber’s hilt. He noticed Kooki, who was observing the incident, doing the same.

“Andrel. Please let Arcia investigate this. Surely you want to know what happened to Nadrin? I know he was a close ally of yours.” Atyiru interrupted, knowing there was little she could do if the Mimosa-Inahj couple actually did choose to resist.

**Cell #7078**

**Present Day**

*Perhaps I should have fought Cortel off. The sway I seem to let Atty have over me these days is worrying. Still, if I’d resisted it may have been years before the girls and I were able to settle down again. Seeing them is the only thing keeping me from going mad in this urine infested hell-hole.*

Andrelious was often left alone with his thoughts, though Atyiru had pulled some strings to ensure that the Warlord saw Kooki and twins regularly, as well as his eldest daughter Saskia, who was acting as Soulfire leader during her father’s custody. The former Rollmaster had been quite impressed with her, at least from what he had heard, and made note that he would push for another elevation for the Cirran once he was free again.

The only other person that had bothered to visit Andrelious had been Atyiru, who would smuggle bottles of Corellian Brandy and Ebla Beer to her imprisoned friend. The alcohol made the long, lonely periods a little more bearable, as did the few occasions that the Miraluka brought some more potent substances.

Waking up from another beer induced sleep, Mimosa-Inahj heard the whirr of the cell’s lock. It slid open, presenting him with the sight of Cethgus Tiberius Entar Arconae, another Arconan that he was far from friends with. Cethgus had been elevated to Proconsul after Marick’s post-war retirement, the Consul job going to the Anzat Legorii.

“It is time for your trial.” Cethgus stated simply, waving several summit guards into the small cell.

Without his weapons, Andrelious had little chance of beating the well trained soldiers, and meekly allowed them to place him binders. He was quickly escorted outside of his cell and placed in a mobile energy cage.

“So is this taking place here, or on Korriban?” Andrelious questioned, making sure not to touch the charged bars of his new place of captivity.

The Proconsul grimaced. He did not enjoy conversation with the former Imperial, thanks largely to his insistence on calling him a ‘Zabrak’. “You’ll see soon enough. If I were you, I’d save your words for the trial.”

Andrelious opened his mouth, as if to provide the retort he usually offered whenever the Iridonian had spoken, but decided to remain silent. Cethgus had the power to threaten him even at the best of times, and now that he was unarmed and imprisoned, he stood no chance if the Primarch did choose to attack him. As things stood, he did not feel able to rule that out, but was actually glad for the fact that the summit guard were present, as well as the energy cage that was now slowly hovering towards a large turbolift.

*Here goes nothing.*

**Court of the Shadow Lords**

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

The fairly small courtroom was not among the more used areas of the Citadel. The nature of Arcona as a Dark Jedi governed organisation often meant that those who would be put on trial elsewhere were simply executed, whilst others were left to rot in a prison cell. Andrelious, however, was popular enough within the Clan that not only was a trial needed, but that its procedures would need to be followed to the letter.

Once his cage was opened, Andrelious was shepherded into the shielded area that was used by the defendant. He had decided that he would act as his own defence council, so was on his own behind the green-tinged field of energy. Through it, he could see that the majority of the Clan was watching from the observation area. Kooki had come with the twins, one carried on her front, the other on her back, in a pair of purple dyed cotton carriers. The distance and shielding prevented the Warlord from clearly identifying which baby he could see. Next to Kooki was Celevon, the girls’ remaining godfather. The Priestess sensed her husband’s arrival and looked up at him with a smile. The ex-Imperial returned it as best he could.

The other side of the courtroom was where the various witnesses were seated. Among them were the majority of the current Clan leadership, as well as most of Soulfire and what remained of the Erinos family.

In front of the defendant’s booth, a large bench behind a tall durasteel stand demarked where the judge would sit, whilst an area to Andrelious’ right was reserved for the jury, although this particular case did not require one. A Force blind clerk was already in place to the left of the judge’s bench.

“All will rise for the judge – the honourable Marick Arconae, our former Consul!” the clerk announced in a gruff soldier’s voice.

Marick entered the room, dressed in a set of the new robes that Arcona had been awarded for their victory on Korriban. The Hapan male wasted little time in heading over to his bench, his face giving away no emotion or clue to how he was feeling.

“Shall we begin?” he asked as the assembled crowd returned to their seats. Cethgus, who appeared to be acting as the leader of the prosecution team, nodded quietly at his Consul.

“As you’re all aware, today we’re here to establish the guilt of Andrelious Mimosa-Inahj, the Captain of the Soulfire Strike Team, in the matter of his neglect leading to the capture of a former Consul’s son, Nadrin Erinos Arconae. I ask that you all try to remain silent so we can get this all sorted out quickly. I’ll say now that the maximum sentence I am prepared to pass is a full discharge from our ranks. We’ll discuss the ramifications of that if and when necessary,” the Adept continued.

“Thank you, Lord Consul. With my witnesses today, I’m going to prove that Andrelious, through a set of actions that were entirely avoidable for a man of his skill and experience, caused the capture of Nadrin. I’m also going to find out exactly *why* he did it.” Cethgus declared, a little smugly for once. Pointing a finger towards the witness area, he pointed at a blue furry alien who was in the middle of swigging from a small hip-flask.

“I call Kordath Bleu d’Tana of Dark Forge!” the Proconsul boomed, shocking the Ryn into dropping his drink.

“How’s he supposed to remember anything? He’s been drunk the entire time I’ve been here!” Kooki protested as Kordath took his place in the witness box.

Atyiru smirked. “Kooki, dear, please. Let him speak.”

“Kordath. You were present when Nadrin announced his return to Soulfire. How did Andrelious react to that?” Cethgus began.

The Priest stroked his chin a little, as though he were struggling to recall the event.

“Well…”

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**5 months earlier**

Having defeated the combined Faust/One Sith offensive, Arcona had begun the clean up operation. Parts of the City had been badly damaged by the incident, but the concern had primarily been for Atyiru, who had been shot. The crew of the *Nighthawk* had also disappeared for a while but were now on their way back, having been rescued by a team led by Qel-Droman Quaestor Turel Sorenn.

The small group that had been dubbed ‘team Inahj’ were back at the Citadel. The mood was generally congratulatory, and the alcohol had begun to flow relatively freely, despite the presence of the tiny Mimosa-Inahj twins, who clung tightly to their mother as they slept in their carriers.

“Should you really be drinking that much?” Andrelious asked his wife as she took a large swig from a bottle of Tihaar that was being passed around among the group.

“I’ll be fine! It doesn’t pass into the milk!” Kooki answered, a hint of coldness in her voice. She had had a tough few days, seeing her husband and daughters both threatened by enemy agents. To top it off, one of the enemy had turned out to be Granta Prackx, an old lover of Andrelious. That Prackx had been the one to free the Warlord irritated Kooki, and she had insisted that the giant redheaded female was not to join them in the Citadel. Andrelious and Atyiru, despite being grateful for Granta’s role in their rescues, agreed to this, but also promised to ensure that they would find a place for her in Arcona’s ranks.

Nadrin approached Andrelious. The younger Warlord gestured to a quieter corner of the room, indicating that he had something to tell the Soulfire Captain.

“We’re finally among friends right now. If there’s something on your mind, you can share it with all of us. It’ll be a while before the rest get back, anyway. And by then we’ll probably all be passed out,” the ex-Imperial stated, noticing that Kordath was already having trouble staying conscious.

“Very well. I want to make a *yaim’ol*. The Qel-Droman life just isn’t exciting enough,” the Erinos stated. Andrelious looked confused.

“He means he’s coming home.” Saskia explained. Her father smirked.

“Excellent. We’ve certainly missed your tactical expertise on the battlefield. I didn’t think Port Ol’val was quite your scene,” he stated.

**Court of the Shadow Lords**

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**Present Day**

“So you’re saying that he was pleased to welcome Nadrin back? Are you sure?” Cethgus probed.

“Like I said, I was half out of it, but I’d certainly remember any cross words. Ina..Mimosa-Inahj certainly used to aim enough of them at me,” Kordath replied.

“I think you were drunk, Kordath, as you are now. Focus CLEARLY. You know what Andrelious is like. Power mad. He’d not want anyone even CLOSE to his equal. It would stop him from advancing! With Nadrin in the team, there’s no chance of him taking Atyiru out!” the Primarch roared, his eyes flashing red as he raged.

“Brother, Andrel’s not like that anymore! If he’d wanted rid of me, he’d have just let Braxant do it!” Atyiru wailed, leaping to her feet.

“Silence, sister! You’ll get your chance to speak!” Cethgus snapped back.

“Cethgus. You’re trying to lead the witness. As it is he’s clearly too inebriated for his testimony to be useful. Stand down, Kordath.” Marick ordered. Atyiru returned to her seat, patting the Ryn on the back as he walked past to return to his.

“You want a more sober witness? Fine! I call Saskia Ortega-Inahj!” the Obelisk bellowed.

The Epis emotionlessly climbed into the witness box, ignoring the whisperings and stares of the remainder of the Clan.

“Saskia. Put aside the fact that Andrelious is your father. Tell me, how did he handle himself when he made planetfall. Did he seem to be showing any signs of wanting rid of anyone?”

“I don’t need to put aside that he’s my father. It means little to me. As for what you asked...”

**Arconan Landing Area**

**Korriban**

**4 months earlier**

The featureless desert stretched out for miles in all directions. Andrelious quietly noticed that the barren, hostile nature of the area was similar to space, but that was where the similarity ended. The desert was bright and hot, the heat in particular bothering the Warlord. Saskia, on the other hand, seemed to take the conditions in her stride and remained her useless stoic self.

“The Sith Academy is ten and a quarter klicks west-south-west of our present location. There’s two major pockets of resistance on our route. One’s an allied group of Taldryan and Scholae forces, whilst the further group are attached to the traitorous Master At Arms and the One Sith. I don’t have actual numbers or compositions for either, so we’ll have to proceed with caution.” Nadrin explained, studying a large map of the area. It hadn’t taken him long to slot back into his role as Soulfire’s tactician.

“Alright. River, keep an eye on all comms traffic. Anything you hear may tell us exactly who or what is waiting for us. Nadrin, do we know how much intel the enemy have on us? Given we’re dealing with Esoteric here, it’s entirely possible that we’re walking into a massive trap.” Andrelious said as he went over the mission parameters on his datapad.

“That’s a hell of a long walk! Can’t we get a ride?” Achilleus complained.

“We’re going into the unknown. If we all get aboard a tank or a walker, and then the enemy have their own vehicles, we’d be hopelessly outnumbered. As you’d know if you used your brain!” Nobilus hissed.

“Watch it, kid, or I’ll spill yours right here on the sand!” The Iridonian snarled back.

“You two. Stop it. You’re in Soulfire. We fight our enemies, not each other. Got it?” Mimosa-Inahj snapped, addressing both his former and current apprentice. The rivalry between the two had begun to irritate the Warlord.

“Nadrin. As tactical expert, I’m deferring to you, here. In what pattern should we proceed? I was thinking me at point - as when I first joined. Saskia, you keep an eye on the weaker members. Your dual blades and ability to bend the mind are going to be needed, too. Nadrin, you and Wes cover the rear. It’s always good to have an Erinos if the back comes under attack.” Andrelious commanded.

“Pretty much exactly what I’d suggest. Keep the non-combat orientated operatives safe, me and you at each end. One thing - are you sure Saskia can fight? She’s just our *gotabor*,” the masked Warlord replied.

“Do I need remind you I speak Mando’a? I can give you a demonstration of just how good I am if you like.” Saskia warned.

“Like I said, save the fighting for the enemy! Let’s get moving!” the Soulfire Captain barked.

**Court of the Shadow Lords**

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**Present Day**

“So under your father leadership, you were fighting amongst yourselves. Doesn’t sound very professional, does it?” Cethgus asked.

“I agree,” came the simple reply, the chestnut haired female as tight-lipped as ever.

“Thank you, Saskia. I have nothing further for you.”

Marick pushed a button on a small console, deactivating part of the shield that had separated Andrelious from the rest.

“Your witness, Andrelious. Do you have anything?”

The Warlord nodded. “Just the one question. Saskia - tell everyone what happened when we went over that ridge. You know which one I mean.”

**8km from Sith Academy**

**Korriban**

**4 months earlier**

“We’re approaching an encampment. Cotelin aligned forces.” Riverche announced, her earpiece buzzing loudly. It was the only sound breaking the silence of the desolate area.

“I sense them. They’re over that ridge. Expect stiff resistance. Taldryan have some of the oldest and wisest Dark Jedi in the Brotherhood. Scholae, as well, have some powerful individuals. I wouldn’t want to run into Kell Dante.” Andrelious warned.

Saskia smirked. “From what I’ve heard about him, he’s even more in love with the old Empire than you are. Perhaps we could convince him to join us.”

“Enough talk! Let’s give those old boys a taste of the present!” Achilleus roared, sprinting past his team and towards the ridge.

“Krayt, NO!” Mimosa-Inahj cried. But it was too late. The Iridonian disappeared behind the crest of the ridge. Seconds later, a large explosion drowned out the crunching of sand under the feet of Soulfire as they ran to catch up with their gung ho colleague.

“Land mine. The area’s probably littered with them. They’ll know we’re here, now.” Nadrin stated gravely as he activated his lightsaber. The rest of the team followed suit almost in unison.

“Right. Proceed carefully. And stay together! We’re already down one.” Andrelious commanded.

Before they could reach the ridge, Soulfire came face to face with their enemy, who had been alerted by Achilleus’ fatal error. From their robes they were identified to be members of Taldryan, as the intelligence report had suggested. They too were armed and ready for combat, some with lightsabers, some with blasters.

“Harbingers, attack!” a bearded Human yelled, charging in with his own orange bladed lightsaber.

Andrelious intercepted the enemy leader himself, the long handle of Warb Null’s lightsaber giving him a few extra inches. His opponent blocked the attack, but was soon bested, finding that Mimosa-Inahj was far more powerful than he was.

Meanwhile, Nadrin had hurled a trio of Taldryanites backwards, his command of the Force allowing him to steer their landing straight onto another land mine. The mine detonated, the heat of the explosion enough to almost melt the unfortunate threesome, two men and a woman.

Saskia, supported by the newly Knighted Nobilus, easily eliminated an Umbaran sporting a yellow blade, before turning their attention to a tall, athletic Human who had pinned Scarlet down.

Andrelious feinted around the blade of his enemy, and with a quick change of direction, sliced his legs clear of his body, following up with a second attack that removed his saber-carrying arm. Pushing the severed limbs away, the Warlord crouched down in front of the defeated Taldryanite, his eyes bright red as the dark side coursed through his body.

“Call your men off! I want a list of all of the mines, and any other nasty surprises you’ve left around here! You’ve cost me one man as it is!” the ex-Rollmaster hissed. The defeated Human raised his remaining arm to what was left of his team. Most stood down immediately, but the Human who had been attacking Scarlet seemed to only be galvanised by his nominal superior’s surrender, and charged straight at Nobilus, bypassing Saskia’s dual sabers.

Stepping back, the young Knight evaded the first attack, but was caught by the next, the white blade burning him across his torso. He raised his own, brand new lightsaber to parry the next attack, but it never came. Andrelious, furious at the wound that had been inflicted upon his apprentice, had reacted brutally and beheaded the Taldryanite.

“You’re for it now.” Saskia told the defeated Harbingers leader.

**Court of the Shadow Lords**

**Arcona Citadel**

**Estle City, Selen**

**Present Day**

“So, Saskia, you’d say that we fought as a unit?” Andrelious questioned.

“Definitely. Especially because we’d just lost Achilleus,” the Epis answered plainly. Achilleus, despite being his on paper role being that of the weapons specialist, had found that his main use within the team had been his ability to organise the team through the Force - a rare ability.

“And you’d say that I was professional enough in my role as leader?” the Warlord continued, wasting no time with emotional fluff. He knew his daughter well enough to know that she hated such things.

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Saskia. I have no further questions.”

The acting Soulfire Captain returned to her seat, showing little interest in the continued proceedings, other than for a brief look up at her father as the shield reactivated, covering him in its sickly green hue.

“Your next witness, Cethgus?” Marick demanded.

The Iridonian paused for a few moments, as if he were re-thinking his strategy. He had certainly hoped for a more damning testimony from Saskia.

“I call Uji.” he boomed.

The Templar looked a little surprised, but nonetheless made the short walk to the witness stand. He nodded at Atyiru as he turned to face the Proconsul.

“So, Uji, perhaps you can tell me exactly what happened when Andrelious and his team reached the next wave of resistance?”

“Of course, Lord Proconsul. It’s like it was yesterday..”

**3km from Sith Academy**

**Korriban**

**4 months earlier**

Though relatively short and trouble free, Andrelious had found the continued trek towards the ruins of the Sith Academy hard work. The sun continued to beat down upon the desert landscape, leaving the Warlord and the rest of his team soaked with sweat. The water that they had brought was beginning to run out, even after replenishing their supplies from the defeated Harbingers.

The leader of the Harbingers, who had turned out to be a Knight named Omega Kira, had given the Galerean team an overview of the area that they had set up, so the remainder of land mines had been avoided, but their information had run out and Soulfire were once again proceeding through unknown territory. Once Kira had volunteered the information, Andrelious had brutally executed him. It had troubled the team that the enemy Knight hadn’t volunteered the location of Lord Cotelin, or the legendary Old Folks, but with Taldryan’s frequencies now being monitored by the ever reliable Riverche, Mimosa-Inahj was confident that they would soon have that information.

In the distance, Andrelious could already see the outlines of another group of people, much larger than the one he had previously encountered.

“Looks like we’ve found Esoteric’s allies. I can sense an Elder or two among them.” Nadrin declared.

Andrelious frowned, peering at the enemy. “If it were just an Elder, we’d have a chance. But they’re supported by too many others. Taking them on directly would be suicide.”

“We could turn back.” Scarlet suggested

“Soulfire doesn’t turn back. Nadrin, find your macrobinoculars. Get us as much information as you can. We haven’t got anyone blowing our arrival this time,” the older Warlord commanded.

The Erinos rummaged around in his backpack and produced the requested item. Placing the macrobinoculars in front of his eyes, he quickly adjusted them to focus on the enemy.

“There’s definitely Plagueians among them. I’m guessing the scantily clad one is Selika Roh. Looks like she’s got a few of the Equites ready and waiting. Say, Andrel, do they have any Bpfasshi in their upper ranks?”

“I’m not sure, Nadrin. Why?” Mimosa-Inahj asked, already sensing the concern that his fellow Sith was feeling.

“GET DOWN! They’ve got a YVH-1!” Nadrin hollered, tackling his Captain. The remainder complied, just in time to spot that a rocket was headed straight for them. The projectile flew overhead, exploding nearby as it collided with a small sand dune. A second rocket quickly followed, this time homing in directly on the encamped Arconans. Andrelious scooped the warhead away, finding it was surprisingly hard to do so. As soon as the threat had been dealt with, the Warlord reached for his comlink.

“This is Soulfire Lead. We need support at our location! Enemy units have us pinned down!”

“We’re a little pre-occupied up here! We just got jumped by an Imperial fleet.” a voice answered.

“There’s at least one Elder in this group! I don’t care what you do, just do SOMETHING!” Andrelious ordered, pushing another two rockets away.

“We can spare a single B-Wing. Sending it your way, sir.”

“Keep down. The fleet are sending help.” the Warlord confirmed, as Nadrin guided yet another projectile away.

Moments later, a B-Wing marked as part of the Arcona Starfighter Corps dived into sight, unleashing a pair of bombs in the direction of the enemy encampment. An anti-starfighter turret fired in the direction of the bomber. The bombs impacted with the surface, scorching the sand and almost knocking Soulfire back with their shockwave, but the turret’s fire also made contact, forcing the B-Wing away. Andrelious peered towards the encampment, already sensing that the bombs had caused a great deal of death and destruction.

Nadrin grabbed his macrobinoculars again, and began surveying the scene. He spotted wreckage and bodies among the blackened surface.

“The YVH-1 is badly damaged, and it looks like we’ve killed or wounded the Plagueians. The Bpfasshi’s still standing, though. Suggest we proceed, but with caution,” the Arconae stated.

The Soulfire Captain nodded. “Agreed. Let’s get moving. And be careful. If that Bpfasshi is an Elder as we believe him to be then we’ll-”

Andrelious fell to the ground, struck by tendrils of electricity. The alien, who was dressed in robes with stains and tears similar to those on Saskia’s clothing, was rapidly approaching, his amethyst bladed lightsaber armed and ready.

Seeing his leader felled, Nadrin immediately hit back, hurling a nearby rock at their enemy. The Bpfasshi raised his free hand, and tried to guide it away, but found that the Warlord’s ability to manipulate objects far outstripped his own, leaving him to be knocked to his feet as the rock slammed into his onrushing legs.

As the alien climbed to his feet, Andrelious remained on the ground, still convulsing from the Force lightning. He started to close his eyes, feeling consciousness ebbing away.

**-x-**

“You should be on the *Nighthawk* with your crew.” Atyiru said, softly.

Uji chuckled politely. “After what happened to you with Faust? I’m not taking any chances.”

Atyiru simply sighed and continued to head through the desert. She had overheard Andrelious’ panicked transmission and had diverted towards her fellow Arconans, hoping that her own skills as a field medic would not be required. Uji, despite his role as a crewmember of the *Nighthawk*, had insisted on accompanying the Aedile on her journey down to Korriban. The pair had not yet met any trouble, though they had passed through an area littered with the bodies of Dark Jedi that had apparently belonged to Clan Taldryan. Uji had had to drag Atyiru away - she had tried to issue medical care to the lone survivor, despite his threats to end the Miraluka should she touch him.

“They’re over there! It looks like they’ve got their hands full!” Uji announced, noticing Saskia and Nadrin leading the team in sparring against the Bpfasshi. On seeing that Soulfire were having a little difficulty, the former Jedi sprinted in, the fluorescent yellow glow of his blade almost invisible against the sun.

“Wait, Uji. Someone’s hurt!” his companion cried, rushing in to Andrelious’ prone figure. The Templar did not seem to hear Atyiru, and continued to bear down on the raging alien, who was yelling at Nadrin in what appeared to be binary. Crouching down, the Archpriestess quickly identified the fallen Arconan as the Soulfire Captain. She could feel that he was unconscious, his breathing a little erratic and his body burned from electrocution.

“Andrel. Talk to me.” the Miraluka pleaded, taking hold of his wrist to get a reading on his pulse. As she expected, it too was erratic - the Force lightning had come close to causing cardiac arrest.

Meanwhile, the addition of Uji, a powerful Obelisk, to the already strong Soulfire line up was forcing the Bpfasshi Elder onto the back foot. Even though he was far stronger in the Force than his opponents, the sheer number of them made for a far more evenly matched battle, especially now the YVH-1 had been rendered useless. With a roar the tall alien lunged forward, bypassing the swinging blades of Saskia and Wes. His own lightsaber sliced straight through the torso of Scarlet, bursting his fellow Bpfasshi’s heart. The Protector slumped to the ground, dead.

Atyiru had begun to treat Andrelious. She did not often deal with patients that had been hit by Force lightning, but took the situation in her stride, stabilising the Warlord’s heartbeat and breathing with a combination of the Force and injections.

“Andrel, dear, it’s Atty. Please, wake up. Don’t you leave those girls without a father,” the Aedile whispered as she applied a moist dressing onto the worst of her friend’s burns. Andrelious coughed and spluttered a few times, his face contorting as his body realised it was in pain.

“Atty. Help.” the Warlord croaked.

“I can’t do much for you. I can only carry so much in my field kit. I really need to get you back to the forward operating base.” the Miraluka replied as she continued to treat the wounded Dark Jedi.

Andrelious tried to sit up. “Just get me back to my feet. Soulfire don’t turn back.” he said, knowing that it wouldn’t wash with Atyiru.

“Don’t make me give you an order.” the Archpriestess warned, handing Mimosa-Inahj her canteen. Andrelious took a swig, the cool water inside making him feel a little more refreshed, but still very weak.

Over at the battle, Soulfire had redoubled their resolve after the fall of Scarlet. Saskia, despite her specialisations, was proving particularly stubborn defensively, allowing Uji to channel his aggression, backed up by Nadrin who continued to hurl nearby objects at their Bpfasshi enemy. The alien kept on yelling curses, still in binary, much to the amusement of the Soulfire Sergeant, whose droid Rusaan beeped back angrily from its place on her back.

Leaping high in the air, the enemy Elder steered himself in the air so that he was landing not among Soulfire itself, but their leader, who was still far from ready for action. On sensing the Bpfasshi was approaching, Andrelious moved to activate his lightsaber, but found great difficulty in just holding it up. Atyiru moved to shield the ex-Rollmaster from the ensuing attack, her own blade daring the alien to do his worst.

Shouting yet another statement in binary, the tall alien raised his blade, ready to force the Entar into battle, then suddenly stopped, apparently focused on something beyond the two Galereans. His expression changed from murderous rage to an almost childlike joy, the redness in his eyes giving way to their regular yellow.

“What the frak?” Andrelious asked. Atyiru just shrugged - even with eyes she’d have seen nothing. The Bpfasshi continued to stare in wonder in the apparently blank space behind Andrelious. He was so transfixed on whatever it was he had supposedly seen that he didn’t notice Uji slowly sneaking up on him, only turning around after the Templar had plunged his lightsaber into the Elder’s torso.

Yowling with a mixture of pain, frustration and anger, the Bpfasshi staggered back as if hit by a powerful right hook. Nadrin smiled as he watched Saskia leap in, her twin blades evading the clumsy parry and removing the Elder’s arms. The Epis raised her lightsaber, ready to finish him off, but was stopped by a cry from Atyiru.

“Friends, stop. He’s wounded.” she commanded, moving away from the recovering Andrelious.

“He deserves death! He nearly killed Andrelious - and Scarlet wasn’t so lucky!” Nadrin snapped.

“I don’t care. Kill him and be charged with treason.” Atyiru stated, with a seriousness that surprised the assembled Galereans.

**Court of the Shadow Lords**

**Arcona Citadel**

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**Present Day**

“And yes. I’d say that he followed the orders given. He wasn’t very happy about it. None of us were, but you know what Atty’s like. She even healed that Synin person’s wounds.” Uji declared, nodding.

“Synin Torin? That’s the enemy agent responsible for the death of Scarlet?” Marick queried.

“Yes. Poor lad’s half mad after he lost his droid. Anyway, I suspect that Andrelious only did as Atyiru asked out of his respect for her. If it had been you, Lord Proconsul, I doubt he’d have paid any heed,” the former Jedi continued.

“I agree. I have no further questions for you, Uji,” Cethgus replied, seemingly pleased with what the Templar had added. Marick peered up at Andrelious, who shook his head to indicate he had nothing for the Coruscanti. Uji was dismissed and quietly made his way back to his seat.

The Proconsul again pointed into the witness area, this time at Atyiru. “Sister, I call on you as my final witness.”

The Archpriestess quickly climbed into the witness both, her colourful clothing in stark contrast against the drab robes worn by her peers.

“So, sister, you were with Andrelious and what was left of his team when Nadrin was captured? Tell me *exactly* what happened.”

“I’d prefer you didn’t make me relive those events, but if you insist, brother...”

**Ruins of Sith Academy**

**Korriban**

**4 months earlier**

Once Synin Tonin had been identified and treated, Atyiru gathered the Soulfirians together, instructing Nadrin and Uji to help her with the still wounded Andrelious. The ex-Imperial had tried to insist that he was fine, even going as far to demonstrate a few basic lightsaber moves, but he was far from good enough at hiding the obvious pain that the actions caused, even from the Miraluka. He had, however, managed to persuade the Archpriestess that he had recovered enough to not be sent back with the medevac team that had taken Tonin away.

“Remember, Andrel, when we get there, you’re to sit back and observe. Your heart is still very weak. Too much stress and you’ll be on the floor again,” the Aedile warned.

“Don’t worry. Tonin was one of the One Sith’s strongest operatives. Unless we run into Esoteric or Cotelin, we should be fine.” Nadrin added, trying to lift Mimosa-Inahj’s mood a little.

The journey through the desert had taken several hours due to the various delays. Now, as the group approached the Sith Academy, the sun was beginning to set. The bright blue sky began to turn green, whilst shadows grew longer and longer. The heat in the air was rapidly giving way to far chillier, and for Andrelious, far more comfortable conditions.

Soulfire passed into what had once been the Sith Academy’s main atrium. The roof had long fallen in and been ground down to sand by what little weather did exist on Korriban, exposing the area to the elements. Beyond, however, the structure appeared more complete, and recent work had reinforced the crumbling building. A large durasteel door barred further progress, but the room was devoid of other features, or people.

“Saskia, dear, can you get us past that door?” Atyiru questioned.

“That’s a piece of cake,” the Cirrian smirked.

Saskia prised open the door’s control panel. She worked quickly, examining the wiring before connecting her datapad. With a few simple commands, she had easily seized control of the locking system. She paused before sending the instruction to open, turning to look at her teammates.

“I’ll set it to open in ten seconds. Just be ready.” she declared, readying her own weapons. The *snap-hiss* of several lightsabers being activated filled the air, but Andrelious, remembering Atyiru’s instructions, stood back, ready with his E-11.

The door opened slowly, exposing a corridor filled with Stormtroopers. The white-armoured soldiers started to file out into the open area, firing their blasters with extreme accuracy. For the trained Dark Jedi of Soulfire, however, such enemies were a formality. Saskia chopped several enemies to pieces with her blades, whilst Nadrin hurled others roughly into walls. Before long, the Stormtroopers had been cleared with no further losses inflicted on Soulfire.

“Let’s go.” Andrelious commanded, forgetting he was no longer the ranking officer. Before Atyiru could rebuke or otherwise stop him, he had disappeared into the corridor, followed by his team.

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Atyiru was becoming visibly upset. “Please, brother. You’ve seen the reports. You’ve heard their statements. Why are you putting us all through having to remember this again?” she begged.

“Because I want this court to see just how incompetent Inahj is! He lost half of his squad and led one of the Arconae straight into a trap!” Cethgus roared, slamming his fist down angrily on the witness stand.

“Brother, *I* was in charge when it happened! If anyone led Nadrin into that trap, it wasn’t Andrel!” the Archpriestess wailed.

“And it’s *MIMOSA*-Inahj!” Kooki piped up.

“Order! Atyiru, we’ll establish your role later. Stick to the story for now.” Marick commanded.

**Corridor**

**Ruins of Sith Academy**

**Korriban**

**4 months earlier**

The system of corridors within the ruins had become little more than a maze of twisty little passages, all alike. Some were blocked by rubble, whilst others led into areas that had, like the courtyard, become exposed. Enemy resistance had been minimal so far, but Soulfire could all feel a much more powerful presence nearby.

Riverche’s earpiece had been noisy for several minutes, but the Miraluka hadn’t yet shared anything, choosing instead to listen carefully. Finally, she tapped her Captain on the shoulder.

“There are large armies belonging to Cotelin and Esoteric inbound. They’ll be here in around fifteen minutes. The Ashenites are sending more men, too.” she explained.

“Then I suggest we locate what direction Ashen’s reinforcements are coming from, and make sure we can secure their path. If we can do that, we’ll at least spare them from an ambush.” Andrelious instructed.

“Wouldn’t that require knowing how to get back out?” Saskia asked smugly. Her father glared at her, but said nothing.

“Andrel, let Nadrin guide us. He’s your tactical expert.” Atyiru commanded.

Nadrin took the lead and chose a corridor that led off to the left. He marched through the building with purpose, as if he had always known the way.

*Perhaps his father came here before. There were always a lot of things that I never found out about Zandro.* Andrelious thought to himself.

Pushing an old durasteel door open, Nadrin entered a large room that was filled with modern electronic devices. Also inside was a man hacking away at the stone floor with a large pickaxe.

“Oh. Can I help you people?” he asked, regarding the group. He seemed to particularly notice Atyiru and Riverche.

“And who are YOU two? Don’t see many of your kind. What brings a pair of lovely ladies to a festering ruin like this?” the man questioned, smiling lustily at the females.

“Never mind who they are. Who are YOU and what are you doing in here?” Andrelious replied abruptly before either Miraluka could answer. He quickly took a dislike to the man, especially when he caught him moving his attention from River to Saskia.

“No point in wasting time trying to lie to a fellow Force user. The name is Grey. I’m here trying to find something before the lot of wreck the place and leave nothing. You seem a lucky man..three lovely ladies in your entourage.” Grey stated, noticing that Andrelious wore a wedding ring.

“They’re *MY* entourage, Mr. Grey. Have you found anything?” Atyiru interrupted.

The stranger smiled again. “Like I said, darling, the three of you are the only find worth noting. Perhaps we should leave your men here? I could take you back to my ship and..entertain you for a bit.”

“No time to waste. This *di’kut* is of no use.” Nadrin declared. Grey looked very hurt.

“If you’re in charge of these men, are you going to let them talk to me like that?” he asked of Atyiru.

“Enough! We’re on a mission here, Grey. As my esteemed colleague just said, you’re clearly of no use. I suggest you get out of my sight.” Andrelious warned, reaching for his lightsaber. Atyiru moved over and grabbed her friend’s arm, stopping him.

“No lightsaber.” she reminded.

“As pretty as the ladies are, I’m no fool. Good day, sirs.” Grey answered, making a quick exit.

“Right. Let’s see what the bastard was hiding. Saskia, examine these computers for data. The rest of you, secure this room. I’m sure you could all sense that Grey was trying that act to hide something.” the Warlord ordered.

“Five minutes, Captain.” Riverche added.

Andrelious examined the area that Grey had been digging. The pit extended into darkness, lit by the occasional glow-lamp.

“Dad. Grey’s records indicate that he found one of the Academy’s storage vaults. That tunnel should lead directly into it. Seems we disturbed him before he could get a proper look.” Saskia stated, her eyes unmoving from the console as it spewed out the departed stranger’s personal files.

“Good work. I suggest we try and get into this vault. It’ll be more secure, plus if we can get hold of some holocrons or whatever was kept in there, we may be able to ensure that Ashen wins this conflict,” the former Imperial ordered, limping down into the tunnel.

**-x-**

The end of the tunnel did not, as expected, lead into the vault. Instead, it terminated in front of a thick durasteel door.

“Grey lied. All he found was the frakking entrance.” Andrelious snarled, kicking a small stone at the door.

“I won’t be able to open this one. The door’s controlled by some sort of Force based lock.” Saskia added, already having studied the control panel.

“It looks like it activates when someone places their hand on the transparisteel. Try it, Saskia.” her father instructed.

The Cirran did as she was asked. The transparisteel felt incredibly cold to the touch, and a further chill ran down her spine moments after she had spread her hand out across the transparisteel panel. The rest felt it, too.

“Welcome to the Vault, students. I am impressed to see so many of you making it this far. Now, you must make a decision. Only one of you may enter here. Who among you has the greatest right? The next one to touch the panel will enter!” a thickly accented voice grated from somewhere.

“Typical old Sith. They’d have expected anyone that came to fight it out. You can even see the old lightsaber burns in the walls.” Wes observed.

“Well, there’s going to be no such fighting today, friends.” Atty responded.

Andrelious moved forward, ready to place his hand on the glass.

“And what do you think you are doing, Andrelious Jongstram Mimosa-Inahj!?” Atyiru snapped.

“I’m taking the risk as Captain. Besides, if there is anything hostile in there, we need a fighter. Not a medic,” the Warlord answered.

“Then I shall go. As an Arconæ, I vowed to give my life for my Clan.” Nadrin stated. The son of Zandro stepped forward, brushing past his Aedile and Captain, pressing his hand firmly onto the panel. With a loud ‘ding’, the door opened.

“Nadrin Erinos. Please step into the vault!” the voice from before commanded, apparently identifying the young Warlord.

“*K’oyacyi,* Arconans!” Nadrin exclaimed, walking through the door. It immediately shut behind him, but a second, hidden door opened - leading to outside.

“The rest of you have failed. Begone!” the voice grated.

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“And that’s the last any of us saw of him.” Atyiru sobbed.

“Sister, are you telling me that Andrelious just sat back and ALLOWED Nadrin to sacrifice himself?” Cethgus interrogated.

“I ordered Andrel not to go. He was hurt, he was suffering. And he’s got two young girls that need him! How many reasons do you want, brother!? Are you telling me that as an Arconæ you WOULDN’T  have done what Nadrin did?” the Miraluka asked, rapidly becoming choked by grief.

“That man in the dock has tried to destroy those above him so many times! The DIA have a large list of journal entries where he spoke of eliminating Socorra, among others! Don’t you see that you and Cortel are at risk!?” the Iridonian howled, anger quickly eroding away the logic from his arguments.

“That was before he met Kooki! He’s far from perfect, brother, but so are you! I trust him not to hurt me.”

“I’ve had enough of this! Cethgus, Atyiru’s right. If anyone ‘lost’ Nadrin, it would have been her. Andrelious was both wounded and outranked. I hereby declare Andrelious is not guilty, and return him to the control of House Galeres. Case closed.” Marick ordered, releasing Andrelious from the defendant’s box.

“Better luck next time, Cethgus. Perhaps you just stick to killing people outright. You’re much better at that than all this legal nonsense,” the Soulfire Captain taunted. A nearby member of the Summit guard returned his weapons to him, also releasing the binders.

As people started to stream towards the exit, the doors flew open. A bedraggled Nadrin Erinos stood the far side of the door, unmasked and in badly damaged armour.

“Nadrin!” Atty cheered, almost knocking the Warlord over as she ran in to hug him.

“So. You got out of the ‘vault’, then. Care to tell us what happened?” Andrelious asked.

“Maybe tomorrow. Right now I just want some Tihaar.”

*FIN*