Had Dralin still possessed working tear ducts, the sand of Korriban’s wind would have caused his vision to blur. He continually reminded himself of the benefits of his cybernetic eyes to distract himself from the trauma that caused him, and the coping mechanism seemed to work. The Coruscanti Dark Jedi brushed sand off of his jacket disdainfully as he strode purposefully toward the ruins of an ancient academy. Just as the mysterious hologram had said, it was currently abandoned yet crucially placed; it would not be long before others attempted to gain control of it. Dralin’s advantage, it seemed, was time. Larger forces needed time to move and organize, while Dralin simply made his decisions and committed to his course.

The wind howled as he ran his hands against the scoured-smooth stone wall, but the Force was an ally he was glad of which to take advantage. Immediately his Force senses travelled the stone, noting its miniscule pits and crevices that were almost invisible to the naked eye. In a heartbeat, he noted a separate rectangle of wall that could be depressed. His hands followed suit and a door, whose near-perfect seams had hidden, swung inwards. With an undaunted step, Dralin entered and closed the door behind him.

The academy-cum-tomb was nearly silent. Shifting dust from centuries-long settling rattled here and there, but Dralin could hear the distant echo of hesitant footsteps.

*I am not alone, it seems.* He told himself that he regretted the necessity of killing the potential rival for control of the academy, but even he knew that was a lie. His concern for their life was one of pure indifference compared to his ambition. Many Sith wasted their time and effort with gestures of eviler-than-thou, but Dralin had always been more concerned with results than posturing. Posturing had its place, but only when it was an acceptable path to the desired outcome. *Enough philosophical meandering*, he reprimanded himself. The armies established outside of the academy would soon breach the interior, and he would prefer to have found an advantage before that time.

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Connor Grey slowly stalked the halls of the academy. He had come too far only to be taken out by some trap he hadn’t sensed. It took him time to track down this place, and with a war brewing—as he knew it would—it was high time he used what he had learned to take its central control room. From the other side of the academy, however, he felt a presence in the Force. It was as powerful as himself, if he gauged it correctly, and it felt Sith. It felt colder than most Sith, but he reminded himself that many followers of the Dark Side of the Force tended toward a cold burn. From second-hand accounts, it seemed Vader himself was one such individual.

The rogue Jedi centered himself to mask his own Force presence and stalked toward the other being, homing in like a bounty hunter chasing a smuggler.

*It won’t do to have a company before I’ve even cleaned the house…*

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When the echoing footsteps quieted, Dralin was sure he had been spotted. He had previously felt the flicker of another presence, but it too had damped down to indetectability.

*Another Force user, then.*

He sighed slightly at the irritation. Once, it seemed, the galaxy was full of mundane people, but nearly every conflict of recent history seemed to involve scores of Force users. Dralin mused that the galaxy seemed a simpler place when the day was won by the speed of ones draw or the strength of their arms, rather than the ability to utilize a mystic energy, but those days would not be returning it seemed.

*If they cloaked themselves, it means I am already spotted.* The equite weighed his options. Alone, he might have to face an opponent of equal standing, and as a rule he avoided such confrontations. One tool he always had at his disposal, however, was redirection. His mother referred to it as “smoke and mirrors” whenever she intended to face an opponent she might not be able to take, but needed to convince that she could. *But what illusion would satisfy? My opponent can apparently read Force signatures. He would know the count of individuals.*

Even as he thought it, however, a terrible smile spread across Dralin’s face. His youth with the Brotherhood had seen terrible beings, but none were as terrible as the image his mind had conjured.

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Connor steeled himself as he drew his shoto, confident that he could win any contest through trickery. It was, after all, his specialty. Many Jedi thought with their muscles, but in the rogue’s experience the mind always won out in the end. That confidence began to waver, however, as a sound approached. It was the sound of an army. Footsteps fell together in a crashing din, and what sounded to be row upon row of men continued their inexorable march. His confidence would not shatter, however, upon closer inspection—he felt only one man through the Force, nothing more. No army marched toward him to greet him with blaster fire. A snarl escaped from his lips at the thought that someone had tried to trick him. He strode forward as a beam of light erupted from his shoto, bathing him in a silver glow as he began to draw upon his anger for strength.

As he rounded the corner, however, that strength dwindled. Before him stood a man, smartly dressed with red hair and cybernetic eyes. A green-bladed lightsaber was held negligently at his side. While the man might have impressed Connor on a regular day, what stood behind him did not. His early years as a Jedi had taught him fear as the galaxy was gripped in the claws of what stood before him, and nothing since had shown him fear the same way.

Connor blinked, for behind the man stood an army of Yuuzhan Vong. He could smell them, he could see them, but of course he could not feel them in the Force. The Vong were completely invisible to such senses. The rogue licked his lips nervously as he tried his best smile, considering the circumstances.

“Parley?”

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With four steps, Dralin was within arm’s reach of the man. He held up his hand as if to tell the “Yuuzhan Vong” to fall in line. He had witnessed their troop movements himself back when he first joined the Brotherhood, had fought them hand-to-hand. His palpable fear at the time had etched such details into his brain, and they certainly proved useful now.

“Tell me,” he began as he gripped the older man by his collar, “why I should not kill you for trespassing.”

The older man blinked. His hair was as unkempt as the tie around his neck, and it was the tie that had wrapped around Dralin’s clenched fist.

“I-I beg your pardon?” he asked. It wasn’t the question he had expected from what appeared to be a Sith who led a platoon of Vong into Korriban.

That moment’s hesitation was all Dralin needed. The Force, ever his tool and weapon, allowed him to read the man’s surface thoughts like an open book. Illusion and telepathy both were Dralin’s specialties, and even if he wasn’t an Elder of the Brotherhood, his skill and resolve were beyond reproach.

“Ah,” Dralin said, “the command center.” Connor—whose name he had gathered through the Force—blinked again, being unsure of what to do when being so hopelessly outclassed. “So good of you to let me know.”

Out of the corner of Connor’s eye, however, he saw one of Vong waver, ever so slightly. Dralin saw the rogue’s eyes widen, and out of reflex he aimed a blow at the man’s throat; it was the only K’tara maneuver he had continued to practice from his days as an assassin, but it was all he needed. Connor’s esophagus made a satisfying crunch and he tried to gasp for breath. Never an unnecessarily cruel man, Dralin passed his lightsaber through Connor’s torso, ending his suffering along with his usefulness. The illusion winked out of existence at the same time as Connor’s spark of life, and Dralin continued on his way to the command center hidden within the center of the complex.

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Three armies entered the academy that day. Their fighting was fierce, fueled by rage, ambition, and blaster fire. A Rebel Sith slew a Muz Loyalist, while a member of the One Sith waited in the side lines to take out the winner. Two Brotherhood members, torn apart by conflicting loyalties, banded together to destroy one of the invading forces before parting ways in a silent agreement that they never saw each other. The armies met in similar snapshots that history would forget, but it was all for naught.

When the fighting was at its thickest, the academy itself came to life. Thin slits in walls drew forth circular saws, while unseen optical lenses spewed forth laser grids. In some hallways, sections of wall jumped together to crush those trapped between them, which in others the floor gave way to spikes. They were all simple traps, but effective when used upon mobs of intruders.

Within the command room, Dralin smiled and wondered which faction he would eventually support with his newly-acquired academy.