

Xen'Mordin Vismorsus (#3783)
Scholae Palatinae

The Shadow Within

The Drunk Side
Dreshdae City
Korriban
Horuset system

Connor Grey sat down with a dull thud at the bar. It wasn't even midday yet so the Drunk Side was nice and quiet. The jukebox in the back played some quick tempo pop music that Connor had never developed a taste for. But luckily it wasn't overpoweringly loud. The cantina owners knew better than that. At this time of day the only people in the cantina would be ones not interested in getting a headache.

There were plenty of headaches to go around anyway.

"Gimme something strong," Connor said to the bartender.

He pulled out a cigarette and lit it as the bartender gave a slightly exasperated sigh. Out of the corner of his eyes he scanned the room, dark alcoves of booth seating all appearing empty. With the war not many had time to spare here, or the life. Connor took a long drag of his cig, letting the tension in his shoulders relax. A few quick drinks while his contacts organized transport, and he would be off planet by lunch time.

He wore a self-satisfied grin on his face. He had played his games well, and now was quite a bit richer than he had been when he first arrived on Korriban weeks earlier. With the war showing no signs of stopping however, it was time for him to take his money and get out of there. He knew the Dark Jedi would be looking for him anyway. The bartender slid over a drink in a tall narrow glass, glowing with a slightly blue tint.

"A Hoth Mind Icer, bit early in the day for something that strong don't you think?"

Connor jumped.

"Sorry, did I startle you?"

Connor blinked a few times and took another drag of his cigarette to stall for time. A woman had appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, at his side. She had long dark brown hair and large blue eyes. She was smiling, ultra white teeth shining even in the low light of the cantina. Her outfit left little to the imagination.

“You move quietly is all,” Connor finally said. He pulled his cigarette from his mouth and took a long deep gulp of his drink.

“So what brings you to this war torn hole in the wall mister...” The woman trailed off.

“Grey. But you can call me Connor. I should ask you the same thing miss...”

“Call me Jean and I’m here looking for... some items of substantial worth.”

“Of course you are.” Connor took another drink before continuing, “Which side sent you?”

“Sent me? I’m not here for you Mr. Grey, I’m suppose to be meeting someone here. You just happened to look like a good way to pass the time.”

“Yeah, and how much time is that?” Connor asked before taking another large sip of his drink.

“More than enough for you.” Jean’s eyebrows raised suggestively as she spoke.

Connor sat for a moment weighing the possibilities in his mind. He wasn’t a fool. It would take more than a nice smile and pair of tits to pull the wool over his eyes. He had swindled his way through dozens of systems. This was a set up, Connor was sure of that. But it didn’t mean he couldn’t enjoy playing along.

Then the world went black and his head fell forward to the bar. His glass fell spilling what was left of his drink.

“Well that was easy,” Jean said. She pulled Connors head up by the hair and pulled down one of his eyelids.

“Yeah he is going to be out for a while.”

“Are we really that easy to play?” The bartender asked. Jean nodded.

“You have no idea. Too busy wondering how I was going to play him to notice you and his drink. Was it enjoyable getting to play for once sir?” Jean asked as she stepped away from the bar.

“It was nice to break up all the killing at least,” Xen’Mordin said as he hopped over the bar. He shot his hand in air, giving a circle motion with his pointer finger. Several Palatinaean guards popped into sight to secure Connor. Xen knew Connor had a hand at selling what all the Brotherhood members sought. Xen was going to get the answers he needed to end this war.

Abandoned Warehouse
Dreshdae City
Korriban

Rhiaen Ust'essi snapped up awake as ice cold water was dumped on her head. She tried taking a deep breath, but the wet cloth of the bag over her head pressed in against her mouth and nostrils, choking her. She coughed mind racing as the bag was ripped from her head. Blinded by the spotlight shining on her and head pounding, she took some grateful breaths.

She was chained to a chair. A single burning spot light shone down upon the Twi'lek. Whomever removed the hood from her head or dumped the water on it was no where to be seen. Beyond the spotlight was only darkness. She struggled a moment against her restraints. Her wrists were bound so tightly that her hands were starting to go numb.

"Where am I?" She screamed out into the shadows. Her voice echoed through the room.

"Where you have always been. A light in a world of *darkness*."

The voice came from all around, and yet, from nowhere. Rhiaen struggled again. Her wrists barely budged.

"Come out and face me coward."

"I sense some *ice* in those words Jedi."

"Even Jedi react poorly to being held captive."

"No I don't think that is what it is. I can feel you. Fear. Pain. *Hatred*," The voice punctuated each word.

Rhiaen struggled some more, mind racing. She had been moving through the alleys of Dreshdae, trying to reach her objective. She couldn't fail. Too much was riding on her success. Then her mind landed back on her sister.

"Ah yes, that right there. Anguish. We found you alone outside of the Drunk Side. Tracking someone it seemed. Curious for one who has made such a name about being inseparable from her *sister*."

Rhiaen shut her eyes tight, trying to hold back the tears. The voice didn't continue. After several moments the Twi'lek slowly opened her eyes. Inches from her face was a hooded masked man peering at her. She knew exactly who it was.

“Lord Vismorsus. Does the Voice approve of this?” She said coldly. Xen’Mordin smiled behind his mask.

“This doesn’t concern Mav. We are all on the same side,” Xen said still hunched over, face inches away.

“Let me go,” Rhiaen said with as much conviction she could muster. Her eyes were locked on the dark slits where Xen’s eyes hid in shadow.

“You see me as some villain. Parading around here, sacrificing lives in the name of power. You know what is at risk here.”

“So why play these games?”

“Because I think you need a dose of reality. And because I know for a fact you are after the same thing I am.”

A muffled noise, like someone fighting against a gag came from the shadows. Rhiaen strained her eyes trying to make out what was hidden. Xen waved his men forward. Two rather burly soldiers dragged Connor Grey in by his shoulders. He had a tightly wound gag that he was fighting against. There was a rather rough bruise forming on his forehead.

“Connor? Connor Grey is a dose of reality?” Rhiaen asked incredulously.

“Oh don’t write off Mr. Grey here just yet. He has so many juicy secrets rolling around in his head.”

Connor gave a death glare to Xen and gave several rather strong muffled words.

“Thats not very gentlemanly,” Xen chided.

He reached into the conman’s jacket and pulled out his lighter and pack of cigarettes.

“You know they say these things can kill you,” The Sith Warlord continued. Xen lit up one of the cigarettes and held it idly.

“Now my lovely, lovely Rhiaen. I am going to give you a chance to evolve. To embrace the full power of the Force. To take charge of your own destiny.”

Xen paused and looked at the slowly burning cigarette. He cleared his throat before continuing.

“Our rogue friend here knows exactly where the writings are. He knows because he was the one who took the only copies from the Valley of the Dark Lords.”

Xen reached out with his free hand and grabbed Connor’s messy blond hair, forcing the Connor to look directly at him. Xen shrugged and shoved the cig directly into Connor’s left eye. It hissed and sizzled and even with the gag, there was no mistake that Connor was screaming.

Xen dropped the now extinguished cigarette to the ground. He let go of Connor’s hair and snapped his fingers. Another soldier quickly stepped out of the shadows and cut through Rhiaen’s restraints. The Twi’lek pulled her hands forward and rubbed her sore wrists. She remained seated while Connor continued to fight against the soldiers holding him.

Xen looked back over his shoulder at Rhiaen.

“Embrace your emotions. Take control of your destiny.”

There was a clank as a toolbox was dropped to the floor next to Rhiaen. Rhiaen’s eyes shot to it and then back to where Xen’Mordin had been standing, but he had already vanished.

Xen had his feet up and hands behind his head as he watch the reports stream before him. Troop movements, deaths, supply chains, All floated across the display in front of him. This warehouse was a far cry from the comfort of the Excidium II, which was hiding safely out of range of the enemy ships in orbit, but it would do.

As far as the Palatinaean forces could tell, this warehouse had been abandoned for at least two years. It was luck they managed to secure it, and for the time being, it was the only foothold they had in the city. Esoteric’s One Sith held control of the city. The general population, already beyond tired of this war, were becoming increasingly hostile.

“Do you think she will do anything?” Jean asked. She was standing just behind Xen reading the reports.

“She will. The Ust’essi Twins always flirted with the line between light and dark. If Rhiaen is out here alone, someone is either holding her sister or she is another casualty of this war. Either case won’t make Mav happy. They were some of his best.”

“Yes, but why have her do this. We are losing this war,” Jean pressed.

“And if we are going to survive everyone needs to be fully committed. Rhiaen, as hopeful she is for the Jedi, is a capable and dangerous asset. We wouldn’t have lasted this long without

the information she and her sister have passed along. Alone she is scared. You don't even need to be force sensitive to pick up on her fear and pain. She reeks of it."

"So this is about having her survive this war?"

Xen sighed.

"Oh picking up that I'm egging you on? Men. Always so slow."

There was a firm knock on the small office's door. In stepped one of the soldiers. Behind him stepped a sure footed Twi'lek. Her lighter teal skin color fully emphasized the dark splashes of blood on her face.

"He sold the writings to an information broker here in the city. Udvenk Dolskav," Rhiaen said. Her entire demeanor had changed. There was a hunger in her eyes, a eagerness in her voice. Xen would have smiled in seeing these changes but they weren't at the front of his attention.

"Udvenk Dolskav? You are sure of that?"

"Connor was more than forthcoming, eventually at least. He is still chained up if you wish to ask him yourself."

Xen swore loudly then reached and tapped some buttons on the console. A dossier appeared on the screen, including a photo of the Houk.

"A Houk?! An information broker? This is a joke right?" Jean shouted as soon as the photo appeared on the screen. Even the soldiers in the room gave a skeptical look at Xen as if he was off his rocker.

"Don't be fooled. He maybe be a hulking beast, but he is cunning, and sharp. Udvenk has dealt in secrets all around the galaxy, to any side that is willing to pay. If he is here, and in possession of these writings, we are fraked."

"Really? Fraked?" Rhiaen asked unimpressed. The Houk were mighty fighters for sure, but intelligent enough to run an information network was a bit of the stretch. She continued, "You sure he isn't just the muscle for the operation."

"Both," Xen said staring at the photo. He took a deep breath before explaining.

"Houk has a quite a strong security team. Including former Force trained Imperials. He himself is proficient with every type of weapons ranging from lightsabers, to blasters, to a chunks of rocks."

Xen pressed another button pulling up some archived footage. The timestamp placed it as just over a year old. It was security footage that jumped from camera to camera, following a small special forces team through the halls of some compound.

The team stopped and placed some charges on a door. The footage switched to inside the room, where a Houk, supposedly Udvenk sat at a desk. The door blasted open. Before the dust and smoke could settle the Udvenk was on his feet, large mace in his hand.

What followed was 10 seconds of slaughter and bloodshed. Before the smoke could even clear all the members of the spec ops team were on the ground dead. Some in several pieces.

“Uhhhh. That didn’t look fun,” Jean said wide eyed.

“This is just some of the footage Udvenk leaves around for people to find when looking for him. We’ve got hours of it. Only a serious pay day could have drawn him to Korriban. He probably has a lot more than just the Rite of Immortality pieces we are looking for.”

Xen looked back and noticed Jean’s expression. He shook his head.

“Yeah you won’t be going on this one,” he said. Rhiaen raised a hand. Xen turned and shook his head again.

“And yes. You will be.”

Former Durasteel Processing Plant
Outskirts
Dreshdae City
Korriban

“I think they know we are here!” Dante yelled before popping up to fire some quick shots. There were hiding behind some low machinery as blaster bolts flew over head.

“What tipped you off?” Xen yelled back.

Their plan had been a simple and elegant one. No fuss, no mess. Stealth and quick movements were going to be their key allies in getting to Udvenk. Of course there had been some miscalculations along the way. And now here they were, pinned down in the durasteel processing planet that Udvenk had turned into a mini fortress for his stay on Korriban.

“You don’t pay me enough for this,” Evant interjected before diving to another cover trying to get in position to flank the guards protecting Udvenk.

"I pay you?" Xen responded. He popped up from behind cover, red lightsaber ignited, reflecting back blaster bolts. After a few seconds of waving his blade around, he returned to cover.

"This was a stupid plan. Why couldn't you leave me behind with Jean?" Rhiaen asked as Xen plopped back down.

"You still need to seize your destiny!" Xen replied half sarcastically. He reached and grabbed a grenade from Dante's belt. He looked up at the soldier who was still firing away.

"I just pull the pin and throw right?"

Dante stopped firing just for a moment and gave Xen a sideways glance. Xen shrugged, smirk hidden by his mask and threw the grenade toward the nearest cluster of guards. It bounced once and exploded, sending the guards into many charred chunks of flesh.

As the flesh of the guards rained back down to the ground, Evant and Archangel popped out of cover on opposite sides of the room and rushed the guards. Now with enemies on three sides, the Rebels were able to push back against the the guards. They tore through guards on the factory floor. Battered, bruised, and sweating the strike squad came to a halt in front of the main elevator shaft.

Evant pushed a button to call the lift. From floors above a dull boom could be heard. The doors to the lift opened. It was an empty shaft. Evant started to lean into the shaft but a quick hand from Xen'Mordin pulled him back. There was a whooshing noise as the quickly free falling lift went crashing into the sublevels.

"Holy hell," Evant said wide eyed.

"We are just going add that to the list of things you owe me for," Xen'Mordin said.

"There is a list?" Evant asked.

"Yeah, well Xen can worry about updating that list later. We get to do this the fun way," Dante interjected as he pulled some harnesses from a bag.

They breached the door leading to Udvenk's living quarters. There had been some bickering about who would be first through the door. In the end Dante, followed closing by Archangel were selected, quite against their wishes, to lead the charge in. Dante was smacked down by a table that Udvenk had thrown the moment the Palatinaean's head came into view.

Arch, expecting that Dante would be hit first dove forward and into the room proper. As he rolled back up to his feet, he found himself staring face to face with the Houk.

“Woah, you are one ugly mo-,” Archangel began unable to stop himself. Udvenk’s fist met the behemoth of a man’s face. Udvenk let out a great roar of triumph and Arch fell backwards, landing squarely on top of Dante, who was attempting to get back to his feet.

Evant, who was next in line to venture into the room leapt into action, lightsaber active. Udvenk at seeing the blue blade, pulled his own white bladed lightsaber from his belt. The Houk slashed out with several powerful swings. Evant blocked as best he could, trying to draw the attention of the information broker from his allies who didn’t bother returning to their feet, and stepping half-heartedly into the room.

“You Sith are bold!” Udvenk yelled, slashing wildly.

“Some of us aren’t Sith!” Dante yelled, blaster in hand. He pulled the trigger, shooting Udvenk’s left knee.

The Hoak fell back, blade flying through the air. Xen, who finally decided to enter after everyone else, reached up and pulled it toward him with the Force. His hand wrapped around the hilt, deactivating it. It was surprisingly heavy for a lightsaber hilt. Udvenk hit the ground with a loud thud.

“I’ll frakking kill you!” Udvenk screamed from the ground. Evant stepped lightly forward and pointed the tip of his lightsaber inches from the Hoak’s large flabby chin.

“I still don’t believe this guy is an information broker, he has to be just a visible decoy,” Rhiaen said. Her voice was hard and angry. There was little doubt what was left of the diplomatic champion of the Jedi was dead and gone inside her. Udvenk laughed.

“You’re pretty so I wouldn’t expect you to have any brains. I know things that would make your skin crawl girl.”

“You would be surprised what it takes for that.”

Rhiaen reached to pull a dagger from her belt. Xen’Mordin caught her hand and shook his head.

“You know why we are here,” Xen said turning his attention back to the Udvenk.

“Same reason everyone is on this god forsaken planet. You know I accept credits, this shoddy attempt at breaking in here isn’t necessary.”

“You think anyone in this war would just sit and let you negotiate a bidding war? You severely underestimate the worth of what you have. Where?” Xen said.

He wasn't in the mood for games.

Udvenk slightly jerked his head toward another doorway.

“In there.”

Xen stood silent a moment.

“Arch go check. Tell me if this has been worth it.”

The Battlelord nodded and strode off. Udvenk winced in an apparent bracing for what he thought was coming.

“This has got to be the weakest attempt of a failsafe trap ever,” Arch called from the next room. Several seconds later he came back into the main room carrying a box full of tomes, scrolls and holocrons.

“These are all there was, we need to check them all.”

Xen nodded in agreement. He then flashed a series of quick hand signals. Evant leaned forward and with two quick slashes removed Udvenk's arms. The Hoak let out a different roar than from earlier, pain dripping from every second of it. Udvenk rolled around on the ground in agony.

“Move quickly,” Xen commanded.

Five minutes later they had verified the writings on the Rite of Immortality, along with several other pieces of ancient Sith knowledge. Dante opened up the largest section of his pack. The Obelisk walked and dumped a pile of what looked like ancient tomes and artifacts on the ground.

Udvenk, mind slipping in and out of shock managed to get a semi formed question out.

“Wha- What doing?”

Xen stepped over and pulled his mask off. He bend low and looked through Udvenk's tears and into his eyes.

“No one can know. This place goes up and all this knowledge, lost to the ages. We do thank you for installing a proper self-destruct system in your weeks here. It is going to save us a lot of time turning this place into a crater,” the Quaestor said.

He placed his mask back on and slapped Archangel on the back. Rhiaen pounced as Xen moved away. Blue lightsaber snapping to life she drove it home in the Hoak’s head, killing him. Xen stopped and looked back.

“He was going to burn,” Xen said.

“And he still will,” Rhiaen replied clipping her lightsaber back to her belt. Udvenk had taken and hidden what she had needed. If he hadn’t maybe Nalia would still be alive. But maybe never lived in the real world. The Twi’lek spat on Udvenk’s body and walked away. Xen shrugged to the others and motioned for them to get moving.

“Let’s roll. I could use a drink,” he said.