Tides of change

A secret assignment

***The Citadel, Selen***

***Courtyard***

***39 ABY***

The Consul finished her speech, and the courtyard stood in stunned silence as the gathered Arconans struggled to digest Atyiru’s words. Quiet murmuring began in the back.

“We’re going to war... *allied* with the Jedi?”

“I’ll still kill one or two...”

“... must support our leader...”

The clan was split, but in the mind of Guardian Nashiro Kakos, there was no indecision; he would never ally with the Jedi.

Nashiro stared at his consul who remained on the balcony. Though she could not see the crowd’s reaction, Nashiro had no doubt that Atyiru’s keen hearing and incredible Force empathetic abilities would give her a clear read on her clan’s morale. Nashiro struggled to hide his rage aware that he would shine like a supernova in his consul’s senses. He had no intention of giving away his true feelings in this environment.

He hoped he would be able to hide it from his master.

***Galeres Shuttle***

***Enroute to BAC* Darkest Night**

***39 ABY***

Arcia Cortel sat quietly in her private chambers as the shuttle left Selen’s atmosphere. She glanced out of a small window and spied the *Darkest Night* hanging in low orbit around the planet awaiting the return of her commander. She sighed and turned her attention back to the task at hand.

“Your mind remains guarded, Apprentice.”

Nashiro Kakos entered the room and bowed to his master. “I have been practicing the techniques you taught me, Master.”

Arcia considered this. She had been training her apprentice to use the Dark Side to defend against mental attacks, but she had always left out critical parts of the training that would still allow her to access her student’s mind. Maybe Nashiro’s continued studies in the Shadow Academy had taught him how to correct these vulnerabilities. “And some additional ones, perhaps?” she asked icily.

“My studies progress, Master,” said Nashiro simply.

“Yes. They do,” Arcia agreed. “And as you heard today, soon you will have an opportunity to test your improved abilities against the O’reenians.”

Nashiro remained silent.

“Is there something you wish to say, Apprentice?” asked Arcia, raising an eyebrow. “Something about the mission our consul has placed upon us?”

“No, my Master.”

“No opinions on our alliance with the Jedi of Odan-Urr?”

“No, Master.”

Arcia stood and walked around her small desk to approach her apprentice. She sized up her student, prodding him with the Force for weaknesses in his emotion. She knew he was seething with anger, barely able to control the hatred with the rudimentary techniques taught to the Journeyman caste.

As his Master, it was Arcia’s job to release that hatred.

Arcia’s clenched fist moved with blinding speed and slammed into Nashiro’s jaw with a tremendous force. Bolstered by the Dark Side, the strike sent Nashiro flying across the room into the bulkhead. Despite the force of the blow, Nashiro was on his feet in a flash with his training saber in his hand and his finger hovering over the activation switch.

Arcia sneered. “Suppressing our emotions and stifling our hatred is a hypocrisy of the Jedi, you stupid boy! Allow your hatred to flow and express your rage!”

The small office suddenly became charged with Dark Side power. Arcia felt Nashiro tap into his rage and hatred, the power of his emotions shaking the shuttle itself. The pilot’s voice emerged from the intercom warning of surprise turbulence, but Arcia ignored it; the spectacle in front of her was far more pressing.

“Strike me like that again, woman, and I’ll destroy you,” growled Nashiro, blood dripping from the corner of his mouth.

Arcia suppressed a smile. *Good*, she thought. *Let’s crush this problem now before we have to deal with the Jedi*.

***Arconan Fleet***

***Bridge of the BAC* Darkest Night**

***39 ABY***

Arcia heard his footfalls before she felt his presence. Even in defeat, Nashiro still maintained a mental wall around his mind. She had bent her student, but she had not broken him.

“Master,” he said. She turned away from her command center and faced her kneeling apprentice.

“Apprentice. I see the bacta acted quickly.”

“Yes, my Master,” he answered, still kneeling. If he felt shame from his defeat, he was hiding it well. Arcia noticed a number of the bridge crewmen trying to discreetly watch the exchange between the two Dark Jedi. Rumors spread quickly on a ship even as large as the *Darkest Night,* especially when the commander’s transport lands and the Medical Bay has to respond to a beaten, bruised Dark Jedi apprentice unconscious on the floor of the commander’s quarters. Arcia considered that some of the crew probably even had bets on when the she would kill her apprentice.

“I have summoned you because I have given thought to some of the points you raised on the shuttle back from Selen.”

Nashiro’s head rose and he met Arcia’s eyes. Arcia continued, “We have been given the mission to seize and secure the space station *Sanctuary*, located in orbit over New Tython. If unable to do so, we are to destroy the station to prevent it from falling into O’reenian hands.”

Arcia turned back towards her command console and called up an image of *Sanctuary*. Nashiro rose and stood beside her to study the layout of the space station. “What size force are we expecting to attack?”

“Unknown,” replied Arcia, “but we can expect the O’reenians to breach with multiple assault transports, so we’ll need to establish infantry strongpoints at likely points of penetration.”

Arcia watched as Nashiro worked through the tactical problem in his head. His eyes darted across the display, weighing the information against his experience in the Imperial Storm Commandos. “Likely breach sites are here, here and here,” he said, pointing with his finger at the floating image. “We’ll need at least three elements, though I can’t be sure of what size force is needed until we have a better picture of the enemy.”

Arcia nodded in agreement. “The Aedile and I have already spoken of this, Apprentice, but I’m proposing four elements. Three in the defense, and one ensuring that if we fail, our secondary mission can still be accomplished.”

“The destruction of the station?”

“Yes. In the event we are unable to secure against an O’reenian breach, Arconan elements will conduct a fighting withdrawal back to our assault transports and exit the station. Concurrently, you will activate charges placed on the central power core that will destroy the station.” Arcia tapped a few keys on the command console starting a simulation of the destruction of the *Sanctuary*. “As you can see,” said Arcia as the simulation began, “such a catastrophic event would have... significant effects on the planet of New Tython.”

Nashiro’s face was illuminated by the bright orange of the simulated cataclysm on the planet New Tython, and Arcia saw her apprentice understood the words she left unsaid.

“Do you understand the gravity of the mission I am tasking you with, Nashiro?” asked Arcia, switching off the simulation.

Nashiro nodded. “Yes, my master. I understand the mission.”

Arcia turned away from her apprentice and faced the bridge viewports. “Good. You are dismissed, Apprentice.”

“Master,” said Nashiro. Arcia heard his footsteps as he exited the bridge leaving her among her crew.

“My lord,” said a crewman. “Message from the *Invicta:* hyperspace in two-zero minutes.”

“Thank you,” said Arcia, settling into her command chair. “Order ‘battle stations’. Let’s get this started.”

GRD Nashiro Kakos

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