*Retaliation*

 The shuttle shook as it made its way through the battlefield that was the Stygian Caldera. The loyalist forces of Plagueis had returned to claim what was rightfully theirs, and this was the latest of the clan’s ideas to take back their home, the *Anchorage.* Taranae stood with other members of the team gathered around her, all of them holding onto guard rails and straps as they tried to keep their footing. The idea was a risky one, but the merits far outweighed the problems that could arise from it going wrong. The brief was for a wing of fighters to escort the shuttle to the Anchorage and try to draw fire away as it tried to reach its destination of the lower part of the massive station. They had come under intense fire a couple of times, but even then, the fighters managed to draw away the attackers and the shuttle continued its course.

 Two of the lead fighters broke away and headed to the station itself. Taking up position, they opened fire with all they had, trying to breach the Anchorage defenses. With a loud explosion that shook the shuttle even from far away, an opening was made in the side of the station and the craft headed directly for it at full speed whilst the fighters continued their vigil, forever countering anything that the rogue fleet threw at them.

 With a deafening boom, the fighter holding position near the station exploded, showering the shuttle with debris as it disintegrated under constant fire from two rogue craft. The other turned and opened fire, seeming to aim at something directly behind the shuttle as it came into range of the station, ready to fly in through the huge opening. Taranae’s ship bucked as the lasers missed them by a hair’s breadth, a following explosion being a sure sign that they had found their mark and hit the trailing fighter that was just lining them up in its sights. The assembled team cheered as the enemy craft exploded and Taranae smiled. It seemed that at least phase one of this plan was going to work. Kelly Mendes had been brought along for a specific task, and Taranae watched as she jumped up and down in excitement at the destruction of the following enemies.

 “All down,” came a voice over the comms, “prepare to board.”

 The shuttle grew dark inside as it passed through the opening in the side of the station and the pilot searched for a place to land.

 “Good luck in there,” The pilot called “And bring me back a-”

 There was a sudden scream and then silence. Taranae shook her head sadly, knowing that the pilot had just been gunned down like a lot of the experienced pilots they were losing to the rogue forces in the vicinity. Steeling herself, she made her way forwards to the pilot and looked out of the screen.

 “Put us down over there.” She indicated, pointing to a flat area not far from their position. “Then get out of here as fast as possible. We have more fighters outside waiting for you to escort you back.” She took the pilot’s hand and shook it. “Good luck, pilot. May the Force be with you.”

 The pilot nodded and thumbed the controls, bringing the shuttle around and down to the area Taranae had indicated. As the ship landed, Taranae held up her clenched fist as the ramp lowered. She had been here before and knew of its dangers. She didn’t want to lose any of her team in this hell hole and Kelly would be a major help here. The rear ramp opened into darkness and Taranae moved out and onto the ramp, looking left and right for any signs of trouble. Seeing none, she beckoned the rest of the team forward, keeping a wary eye out for what she knew lurked in the lower recesses of this station. She had seen them with her own eyes during her search for Teylas some time ago, but this time she *needed* to find them.

 Pointing to the left and right with her hand, she made the team fan out. They had been forewarned to be quiet as they entered and all with her knew the dangers that lay ahead. As one solid unit, they moved across the empty space towards an opening in one of the walls that was presumably a door before the fighters had blown their way in. As they moved, the shuttle took off, blowing debris and such in all directions as the thrusters maneuvered it out through the opening again. Taranae hoped it would reach its destination instead of being picked off like most of the fighters. She looked ahead again to the dark portal in front of her and frowned. She could sense nothing ahead, but she knew they would not know they were being stalked until the beasts were almost upon them. Then Kelly would get her moment. The plan to control a sithspawn was a long shot, but one that had to work if they had any chance of taking back the station or capturing Xander Drax. All hopes rested on this small group. Taranae hoped that those hopes would not be dashed.