

**Awakenings - Fiction 2: Difficult Decisions**  
**Atra Ventus - 11708**

—  
*Lost in the Dark*

**Forward Warhost Command Bunker**  
**Fragments of Dentavii**  
**Orian System**

"Now can I go?"

Sang shifted uncomfortably, just to the right of Atra as the Umbaran voiced his question with a little more than a touch of detachment. It was all the Jedi could do to minimize himself from the proverbial blast radius as Locke's eyes turned up, ever so slowly, from the tactical map he had been surveying in order to lock upon Atra's. The Consul looked even more menacing than was normal, rising to his considerable height as his back straightened and he tilted his head curiously. "Oh, is it your role to dismiss **me** now?" the words of the Consul of Sadow was a threat in subtext only, but no less potent.

Internally, Atra sighed. They ran through this song and game so often it had become quite the chore, however it was so ingrained in their unspoken rules of conduct that it would take considerable effort for Ventus **not** to antagonize the Summit. As much as Locke and Atra considered themselves friends, it was in Locke to maintain the structure of command during a crisis... and in Atra to disregard them at every opportunity.

"Sure, now answer the question," Ventus replied flatly.

Locke began to open his mouth to answer when several blips appeared on the surface of the glowing holo before him that represented the tactical map around them. The Consul's eyes flicked to them for a moment before a thought crossed his mind.

"Shall I investigate the contacts, Consul?" Sang, the Ragnosian, spoke up now that he was sufficiently distanced from his fellow Quaestor.

"No, Sang, I need you coordinating the troops here. Atra, since you want to go so bad, they're all yours," Locke cast a sidelong glance at his old friend. "I trust you won't let them land, no matter their purpose, yes?"

"Sure, they'll be all toasty like," Atra muttered dismissively as he turned and made his way from the bunker. He had barely made it three steps before Captain Loth approached with a quick salute.

"I'm told we are to investigate the unknown transports that just showed up, your orders sir?" the Captain was nothing if not efficient at his job.

Atra didn't miss a step, commenting as he continued his strides onward. "Blast'em and let's move on to something actually important."

Loth faltered ever so slightly, barely noticeable in fact, but it was there nonetheless. "Pardon sir, but our initial sitrep suggests there may be unarmed civs on those transports."

"I'm sorry, did I stutter?" Atra glanced over his shoulder, only the corruption of his left eye visible to the Captain.

"No sir, I just—"

"Decided to question my orders in the middle of a tactical scenario that maybe, just maybe, hinges on the unquestioning and efficient following of said orders?"

"Of course, sir, my apologies. Orders received." The man saluted before rushing off back to his unit.

Once Captain Loth was naught but a speck in the distance, Ventus let out a long and heaving sigh. What little remained of his conscious was practically screaming within the confines of the skull, not that it would change anything. How could he be so cold? What if it was his family on those shuttles?

First off, easily... secondly, his family was most certainly not on those shuttles. His family was dead. Killed because of who he was, the one thing he could never change. His light had been taken from him, and now the Umbaran was blind and stumbling through the darkness of his own soul.

Here and now, on the battlefield, was not the time to be concerned over what could be, only what is. The Quaestor of Shar Dakhan had one immediate concern, and that was the enemy in front of him. He would be damned if he let an unknown become an enemy at his back. Closing his eyes tightly, Atra could feel the screams echoing through the Force as his orders were followed to the letter, the final cries of souls torn asunder. He knew the others would have felt it too, but that didn't matter. The sound was nothing new for the Dark Jedi, just one more echo lost among thousands more... Ever reverberating within the depths of his soul.

No time to dwell, however, there was work to be done... and Atra was very good at his work.