**Operation Rendition**

Zoron leaned back in the seat of the armoured speeder and tried to relax. He was jittery from the copious amounts of caffeine he’d drunk during the long, sleepless hours while he’d helped plan this mission. Closing his eyes, he slowed his breathing as best he could and allowed his body to rock and bounce as the speeder raced through the city streets.

After a few moments, he felt his heart rate come back down to a more normal pace. He re-opened his eyes and looked around. There were four other men in the back of the speeder with him and another five in the second speeder that was behind this one. All the men were operators from Taldryan’s Darkfire Team 9. Most had worked with Zoron in the past and trusted him. The last three members of the team had already covertly made their way close to their target building, watching the exits, ready to follow the target if he left before the team arrived. One of them had already set up the security bypass that should disable any perimeter alarms.

The team’s leader was Captain Ruondo, a veteran of many of Taldryan’s campaigns who had saved Zoron’s life on at least two occasions. Ruondo was in the second speeder, leaving the team’s senior NCO with Zoron. The senior NCO for the team was Master Sergeant Aleth, who was seated beside Zoron, reviewing the map of the complex as they rode.

As they got within a kilometer of the target, Zoron received an automated message from their surveillance drone that was high overhead watching them.

“Alright, 30 seconds gentlemen,” Ruondo’s voice came over the comm network. Zoron watched Aleth put his tablet into a pouch before the man did a rapid check of his equipment. It looked casual, but the man had been doing this for so long that Zoron knew it was methodical and well-practised. Zoron did the same, checking the power packs on his weapons and making sure his extra packs were secured properly. He didn’t need to touch his lightsaber to know it was where it belonged on his belt. Provided he was in the same general vicinity as the saber, the connection between saber and him let him know on a subconscious level where it was.

“Sierra One, no change from the building.”

“Sierra Two, no change. No unusual movement in the upstairs still.”

*Good.* Zoron was pleased that their target didn’t appear to know they were coming. They’d gone to the trouble of setting up a number of expensive pieces of tech that would highjack regular comm traffic and replace it with mimicked messages that would keep the target from hearing any warnings. For as much precaution and planning that had gone into this op, Zoron hadn’t wanted it to get blown by some mouthy kid on the local holonet chatting up about the armoured speeders racing around.

The speeder slid to a smooth stop out front of the building just as Captain Ruondo’s speeder arrived at the rear. Zoron’s group of troopers were out within seconds, with the team moving towards the front gate quickly and silently. The lead trooper had a plasma cutting torch out and was making short work of the lock on the gate. Zoron knew that the troopers at the back were simply going to scale the wall at the rear of the building to get into the courtyard.

A moment later Zoron heard the lock fall to the ground and then the gate swung open. There was a rattle as the gate struck the wall at the end of its swing.

“Sierra Two, movement at the window. I can see the target looking out the window… It look like… yes. He sees the rear team. He’s running out of sight”

The troopers in Zoron’s team pushed in on to the front walkway of the building and were suddenly met with a series of bright lights as the exterior security finally kicked in, having managed to work its way through the bypass device. A number of automated turrets began spinning up from the ferrocrete steps that lead to the front lobby.

The team had planned for this, knowing that the bypass was only good for a short while, so two of the troopers with the heavy weapons were already drawing a bead on the farthest turret. At the same time, Zoron slung his rifle and sprinted in towards the nearer turret with his saber igniting as he ran. Zoron’s armour registered the two “friendly” rockets as they streaked past him and detonated on the far turret, completely immolating it. Zoron leapt through the air faster than the other turret could track him and landed in a crouch on top of it, his saber piercing down into the heart of the machine. He stirred his saber around as if it was in a drink and was rewarded when the turret’s laser barrels sagged toward the ground.

Ruondo’s voice came over the comms, “Team two is in. Moving towards the target now.”

Zoron’s team rushed to the front doors, punching clean through the glass in their armour. They quickly spread out, covering off the angles before declaring the lobby cleared. One trooper ran to the elevator and stuck a small explosive charge on it after confirming it was still on the lobby level. As he ran to rejoin the rest of the team, the shaped charge exploded, crumpling the doors into the elevator and rendering it useless.

Ruondo’s team was moving through the rear stairwell and Zoron’s team was about to work their way up the front stairwell; they had effectively pinned their target upstairs. The building belonged to a Taldryan-fronted tech firm, so they’d been able to check the plans to confirm there were only the three paths between the main floor and the rest of the building.

Zoron’s team began moving up the stairs with purpose, clearing through the first and second landings without any issue. As they approached the third landing, a message came over the comms from their surveillance team.

“Sierra One. Top floor window is opening. Body coming out.”

*Sithspit!* Zoron picked up his pace, opting now for speed over safe tactics, trusting that he’d be able to sense any booby traps before they hurt him or his team.

“Sierra One. Looks like he has some sort of backpack on. Advise.”

“Sierra One, this is Lead. Can you disable?” Ruondo’s calm voice came through the channel.

“I can certainly try.”

“Take the shot then.”

Zoron raced to the nearest window as this exchange was going on and smashed out the glass. As he did, he saw a streak of red light lance across from a nearby rooftop to a location not far above his head. He heard a scream and a small pop as some electronics burst into flames. He glanced up and saw the target with a small patch of flame on his back where the bolt had struck, effectively destroying the escape pack. A second later, the target lost his grip on the window ledge and began a slow tumble off the side of the building.

“Sierra One, he’s gonna…” The sniper’s voice trailed off as the target fell.

Zoron reached out with his free arm and aimed his will at the falling target. He focused on using the Force to slow, then stop the target’s free fall, eventually keeping him from piledriving into the ground outside. He gritted his teeth with the effort and grunted with the strain. One of his teammates – Aleth, maybe? – was beside him in the window and immediately turned to his troopers and gave orders. Zoron wasn’t sure what they were saying, but he hoped it was something along the lines of “MOVE FAST!”

As if in answer, two of the troopers ran past him and launched themselves out of the window, striking the side of the window frame hard with a hand as they cleared through it. After a second of freefall, the tethers they’d attached took up slack and they controlled their descents to the ground. One trained his rifle on the target as the other switched weapons. As they touched down, they each slapped the tether releases and sprinted to the target. The one who’d switched weapons fired two quick stun shots at the target and Zoron released his mental hold on him. The target collapsed limply to the ground. He was quickly stripped of the backpack and was manacled in seconds. A cursory check of the target’s body was done before one trooper held a thumbs up.

“Target is in custody. Unconscious but alive. We’ve confirmed it’s him.”

“Darkfire Lead copies. Everyone back to the speeders. Sierras, get moving.”

Zoron, Aleth, and the last trooper clipped themselves in to the tethers that were hanging out the window and hurried to the ground outside. The troopers clipped a repulsor belt to their slumped charge and dragged him beside them as they raced out to the speeder.

All told, the entire mission had taken less than five minutes, but had resulted in no injuries to Zoron’s teammates and had led to the capture of Kalan Trathu, the native Zeltron who had been spying on Taldryan through his connections at the tech company.

Zoron leaned back in his seat and tried to relax. Again.