“…no sir, I am not authorized to do that, sir.” Corporal Jakar looked crestfallen to refuse the fourth direct order. Kazarelth rolled his eyes for the fourth time in as many minutes.

“*Really*, and what are you authorized to do, Sarge?” He whispered another question

“Wait, and watch for signs of activity, sir. And I’m not a Sergeant, sir.”

“And how long have we been waiting for a sign of activity, Sarge?” Kazarelth whispered again.

“Uh…” he looked at his watch, “about twenty six minutes, sir.” He resisted the urge to correct the Krath again.

This was, to Kazarelth’s mind, the difference between the Navy and the Army. Indeed between the superior Chiss mind and the laggard Human: Initiative. Planning. Spirit. General cockiness. The ability to think ahead and not get bogged down by silly rules and what have you. Forty minutes into a recon mission, and the most they had accomplished was trace out the patrol routes of twelve sentries ahead in various distances, located three turrets and motion detectors. But beyond the matte-brown uniform and stern ex-Imperial looks of the sentries, they had found little else of import. A Chiss, a Krath, a man of Learning and Action would have gone tinkering to see what else could be jimmied out of the given data. Soldiers of the fine Yridian army did not hold to such higher philosophies of life.

“Now look here, my fine young man. You seem like you have been around, so let’s play a little game of pretense. You pretend to be preoccupied with this observation crapshoot, while I pretend to go in for a closer look. You do this well, and who knows you might actually become a Sergeant. I know some people quite well up top.”

Corporal Jakar looked conflicted. Three years into this godforsaken employment, and he had only seen Eden lit up on the Southern side of Yridia like a lightning bolt’s residue. And now when they had landed for a mission, he did not get any shore leave. He had heard that Sergeants took a full week of furlough every half-year. But then again, *this* was the weirdo Pel asked to babysit with strict instructions to use him as backup for Alpha and Beta teams - the actual recon squads:

*“He was one of us once, but I have my doubts now. Ensure that he follows the orders to the letter - this is a recon mission with zero sightings.”*

“Sir, I would request that you follow the orders. This is a recon mission with zero sightings.” Jakar replied back in a low whisper.

“Okay, how about, I tell Marshal Oberst that he has a corporal in his employ that will not listen to orders from a Lieutenant Commander of the Navy.” Kazarelth hissed back, hoping that the cheap intimidation would work its magic.

Jakar paused, and remembered Pel’s warning to the Chiss.

*“Priest, I know of you and your dealings with the Keepers. We are no longer a part of that collective. And as such, I am your commanding officer. Do not toe the line - recon and hold sector two-two-bravo of Eden, report back with the security detail and their patrol routes. Do not attempt any further recon. Do not alter the corporal’s mind. I will know. I don’t know how Archean gained your trust, but you do not have mine. Not yet.”*

“I… I apologise sir. But I have my orders.” Jakar’s face was a steel frying pan, devoid of features or emotions.

If Kazarelth’s mind had an organic eye, it would have unscrewed itself from the socket, fallen off and sprouted an eye plant by now. The corporal’s mind was like reading a boring encyclopedia - all facts and no illustrations. Instead of a vivid holovid of a conversation Jakar’s mind produced a bland script, with “Battlelord Pel” written in the centre of the page in block capitals. Kazarelth set up shop inside of it, editing a few words and sentences and constructed an alternate version of Pel’s orders in Jakar’s head. It clicked and the corporal stopped looking uncomfortable.

“So what do you say you give me a bird’s eye view from up that building?” Kazarelth pointed at a richer structure than the one they were recon-ing from, again bereft of lights and activity as this one had been. Jakar shuffled his feet, trying to resolve an internal mental conflict that crawled slowly, painfully through his head. He resumed his defensive grunting of "uhm" and "ah" and "uh".

“Fine, fine. I understand Pel told you to stay here and be in sight of Alpha team’s spotter on the other side of the district. Whatever. Just keep an eye out for bad guys around me, yes?”

“Yes, sir.” Jakar brightened.

Finally, Kazarelth muttered, and turned on both of their transceivers before heading out of the building. Predictably, they had not been missed, and the encrypted channel was buzzing with locations, orders, acknowledgments and status updates. He was more interested in the absence of Yridia IX’s prominent rich from their posh apartment complexes around the Mayor’s dome. Hades had mentioned that it was odd that so many of them were on vacation to other areas of the outer rim, but also granted that this was the season for vacationing. “Elections are far away, and so is a parliament session. Maybe it’s a party offsite or something. I wouldn’t worry about it too much.” He had said, but Kazarelth made out a microexpression of worry in the man’s face. Hades was quicker to perceive things than many.

*‘Well Hades old pal, I’ll get you something as evidence to crease those brows further.’*

He did not know exactly what, though.

He threw a net of the Force in the area in front of him - the same thing he did about thirty nine minutes earlier to ferret out the locations of the sentries and their beat. No other civilian was present in a radius stretching from the Eden entry point to him.

He darted from one building to another, cloaking himself where required and producing a shimmering illusion of the background while he passed a sentry looking his way through the maze of Eden. His hold on Jakar was dwindling, but he had planted enough copying machines inside the corporal’s head that would create photocopies of the script Jakar was reading.

The entire setting of Eden made Kazarelth want to hop, skip and jump from one treachery to another. It was something about Eden’s air, he decided. The industry in general had created a permanent depression over Eden, making it seem like it was eternally in the night side of Yridia IX. Dusk - as it was now - was indistinguishable from nighttime, or dawn, indeed most of the day except high noon. It was good to walk amongst all the tense chatter - it felt like homecoming, and his spirits were high. He let out a few hurried snickers before shushing himself.

So when the sound of a drunken speeder sputtering in the distance rent the air, Kazaelth paused. And then hid as three TIE fighters zoomed past his area bearing the insignia of Tarentum’s Navy.

“Trident this is Kazarelth - I am in sector two-niner-bravo and a squad of TIE fighters just flew past towards district three. They are wearing a really absurd version of the Navy’s insignia. Over.” he called it in.

A pause in the chatter while he hoped that Pel would not spot the slight violation of orders and areas under observation.

“Kazarelth this is the Battleteam Sergeant, repeat your sector, over?” Pel, unquestionably.

“Two-niner-bravo, but did you hear the part about the TIE fighters? They’re wearing crazy insignia - I didn’t know you folks changed it to become larger and more prominent than it was before.”

“Thank you for the observation, and I suggest firmly that you exfiltrate back to your scheduled location, over.”

‘Wait, what?’, the Priest tried to come up with a reason to extend his stay in the zone that was lava for Pel. But before he could come up with anything Kazarelth heard a distant explosion. And then another, and then another.

A bombing run.

The chatter over the com network exploded as reports of explosions in various sectors of district three were confirmed.

“Sarge - three more TIE fighters from the dome headed towards district six.” Someone, an acolyte perhaps, reported.

“Trident, hold to your yellow zones and take cover. The situation needs reassessment.” Pel commanded.

Except Kazarelth was already on his way to reassess the situation. Dodging a few more turrets he spotted a tall and deserted building overlooking the mayor’s dome and lawns. Tall perches were excellent places for recon. He spread another net of Sense over the building, picking up mostly cockroaches and termites from the pipes. The climb to the top through the service staircase took a while, but it was peppered with the confirmations of further explosions in Yridia and the death tolls as they came. Only one other thing lifted Kazarelth’s spirits more than a polluted dusk - mass death. He was humming a low song to the nation of death, when he heard a shaky voice over the com.

“S..sir. This is Jakar. Uh… the uh… Lieutenant Commander - I cannot trace him, sir. Holding the sector as ordered.”

‘For fuck’s sake’, Kazarelth cursed as the retort from Pel came swiftly.

“Is that a blatant violation of my order, Warrior? Exfiltrate to your designated sector at once - if you’re spotted they’ll start gutting district one as well!”

“Re*lax* Pel, I’m inside a building’s service staircase in sector two-one-alpha - they’d least suspect one of us here. Lemme just have a closer look at the mayor’s house, and see who’s running this shit show.” Kazarelth said, switching to the private channel with the commanders of Trident. Hades kept his silence, which was unnerving for Pel and not relevant for Kazarelth.

“I’d file for a court martial at the least.” Pel said, in a low growl.

“Or a duel? That would be fun - also listen, did you know that our lovely Prince isn’t held in great regard here? There’s graffiti all over these walls against him. I'm looking at a picture of Farrin with a knife in his skull - yeesh - and another here which has some sort of multibladed weapon drawing blood from both his eyes . Whoa. They have a good signature though - these graffiti artists…”. His chatter filled the secure line, infuriating Pel who seemed on the verge of biting the comlink down. Hades kept a steady face, as he heard the TIE fighters return from their rampage towards the dome.

“It’s a fleur de lys, in case you were wondering. With a large wreath of leaves and some residual imperial inflection on the design. Cool, real cool.”

As Pel turned the comlink on to give Kazarelth a stern warning, Hades held up his hand.

“Does it have two weeping eyes at the edge of the flowers? Perhaps colored in red - as if crying blood?” Hades asked.

“Well Hades my man your Sense is far superior to mine. That’s exactly what it is. Good detail for a stencil.”

Hades went back to his contemplative silence as Pel looked on. The recon teams were quiet as they waited for further orders. Kazarelth reached the top floor. The whole vista of Eden and the magnanimous lawns of the mayor were in full view.

The sound blast of the squadron hit Kazarelth before the TIE fighters themselves. The bombing run a success, the fraud Navy pilots were jostling around in the air as the Priest watched on. Another squadron returned from a different direction. As he continued watching, they displayed their happiness by forming a rudimentary double helix in the air. Then they descended into the lawns with a soft whump.

The pilots hopped out of the cockpits, and began shaking each others' hands, and giving pats on their backs. He spotted a figure outside the dome, waiting with his hands clasped. He had a visible paunch, even at this distance. As Kazarelth peered with his binoculars, the leader of the squadron walked up to the short, plump figure and shook his hands. While he could not make out the words, he guessed that they were "Good work, captain."

“Trident, abort mission and assess damages in the nearest district. Kazarelth - report any odd activity and exfiltrate per Pel’s orders in two minutes.” Hades’ tough voice came over the communications network, breaking the silence that had held sway over the comlink.

“Does the mayor of Eden shaking hands with the leader of these TIE fighters get filed under ‘odd activity’, Hades?” Kazarelth asked, watching the shorter man - undoubtedly the mayor - lead the captain of the TIE fighters inside the dome.

“It does. We've been collecting pamphlets over the past month urging for an uprising against the Prince of Yridia. And now it would seem like the brutal hand of the Prince has brought devastation to the populace. Smart move.”

*‘A coup, then.’* Kazarelth mused. Perhaps he would be called upon to elicit some details from the mayor’s restrained form soon. He giggled again to himself and darted out of the building.