

## Caught in Midst of a Triad

“What ‘re yo’ doing? Bleedin’ wompra’ bait.” The older humanoid drug the Corellian roughly to his feet. “Were you trying to get ‘erself caught down there or ‘re ye just a fool?”

The Corellian did not respond a few moments as he steadied his breath. He licked his lips and coughed before he spoke: “Did you seriously believe that I would get caught? My biggest worry in there was if you all would actually make it to the spot in time to pick me up. I didn't have to worry with the Force as my ally.” When the Sith opened his eyes, they were full of smug defiance.

With all grunt, the older man dropped Stahoes onto the floor deck. He waved a hand behind him, saying nothing more but proceeding to flash a crude gesture behind him. This elicited a loud guffaw from the Sith as he pulled himself into a sitting positions, his legs stretched out at an acute angle as the sound of his laughter echoed slightly in the chamber for several moments.

The sound of heavy footfalls cut the man’s laughter short. The normally guarded Shadow did not lift himself from his place on the floor plating, instead lazily tilting his head to regard the approaching being.

“When the old man started to cuss up a storm, I figured you made it back in one piece.” A tall Bothan stood in the doorway, glaring down at the Corellian, her face twisted up in a cross expression. “I hope you did not cause all that ruckus for nothing, kiddo.”

Letting out an amused snort, Bentre held up the dull-golden, round-edged cube he had liberated. “One to give away,” lifting his other hand, the man raised the red holocron, “and one to keep.”

“You cannot be serious to think they will let you keep that thing. Do you really believe that they will let a mere Aedile keep such a thing go themselves? If they know you have it...”

“The only way,” the Sith interrupted, “they will find out is if someone decides to do a bad thing and tattle to one my Summit heads. I really hope you have had enough experience with my Clan, dear old Tokk, to know that such a deed would not end well for you. Even worse if you decided to ally with one of our enemies.”

“I am no fool, boy,” Tokk’s gaze became intense, “to believe your thrice-damned Cult would let me slip from under their fingers without taking at least something important as tribute of some sort.” The words hung in the air for several moments before Stahoes chuckled and shook his head.

“Do not worry yourself, old guy. I can say this,” Bentre spoke slowly, “I have no desire to cause you any undue harm if I can help it. I was a bit of a scoundrel myself once, so I can understand the desire to protect both one’s assets and skin.”

Almost as though on queue, a warning klaxon squawked to life. A speaker overhead crackled to life: “Captain, we have an incoming group of signals. Enemy fighters are coming our way. We need you in the cockpit. We have some fighter uglies on an intercept course.”

“Activate the turbolaser turret and pick them off before they come into range,” Tokk bellowed.

“Yes sir, I-” the voice on the other end faltered, “two frigates just jumped into the system. One is Imperial by the look of it. The other is dark-maroon and has a talon on the side.”

“Crimson Talon Company,” the Bothan breathed, “damned Bounty Hunters.” His voice had become hushed for a moment. His shock turned to anger as he glared down at the Sith. “Who the hell did you piss off?”

“Just some browncloaks and some no-name Republic historians.”

“Plot a jump to hyperspace. Get us out of here before they zero in on us. We don’t have the firepower to hold off Imps, Pirates and the Crimson Talon!”

“Aye!” The voice over the speaker cracked as the ship shook. Fifteen long seconds passed before the men in the hold felt the ship buck once. The wait felt excruciating. Finally, the speaker crackled again, a sigh coming from the other end: “We jumped to hyperspace. Next stop should be our rendezvous with the Cult. Looks like we made a clean break, Captain.”

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