

Fear Will Keep The Local Populace In Line - Operation Cobalt: Forceful Recruitment

Information scrolled down the datapad screen as he clutched the device in his right hand. His other hand was clutching the fabric of the seat below him. Eyes darted back and forth as the Corellian read the orders for the twentieth time since he had boarded the shuttle:

Due to falling numbers, personnel are needed. Seek both Warhost-viable and any Force-User individuals from the planet's surface. Every asset we take is one less for the Dominion to take control of. Turn the people of this planet against the Dominion. Get them to volunteer as much as possible. Just try not to kill too many people this time if you can help it, Stahoes. We can only do so much if fear is their only motivation.

“Leave it to someone like Marcus to find a way to take some fun out of an assignment.” Bentre shook his head, placing the worn electronic into his jacket pocket. Leaning back, he tried visualize the planet designated Cobalt. He wanted to recall the information they had all been given in the briefing. The city he was heading contained a factory, serving as a large source of seafood for the little planet. If it was anything like some of the villages he had visited as a child, there were bound to be some people out of work. Just because one is skilled does not mean prosperity always follows.

The shuttle seemed to rock beneath the Shadow, startling him out of his pensive state.

“We are here,” a surly old man called as he made his way from the cockpit through the cramped quarters. “So give me the money, as you promised.”

“I suppose you did well enough,” Stahoes paused, his hand plunged into his pocket. “Though, do you really want to settle for a mere two thousands credits?”

“What?” The old man’s eyes narrowed as he pursed his lips. “Do you have the money or not?”

“Here.” Bentre reached out a clenched fist, dropping the money almost carelessly into the man’s filthy palm. “It’s not as though that is anything compared to-” He let the words trail off, looking past the man at the wall with a smirk.

“Compared to what?” The man’s voice was becoming irritated now. “What are you poking out, boy?”

The last word struck an ill cord with Bentre as disgust flashed over his features for a moment. The Sith forced a smile before he looked the man in the eyes again. “I mean, compared to what you could be making if you worked with us. I have another little job for you, for double the credits. That is just for a start, of course. We would be glad to have a man so *skilled* as yourself amongst our numbers.” Stahoes spoke in a confident tone.

“Four thousand to run you back up to that Trade Station? What’s the catch?”

“Oh,” the Corellian shook his head, “I have no catch my friend. I would just like you to take me and some passengers to meet with my bosses. Once there we can discuss your *lucrative* future employment. If you are interested, be back here in two hours time. If not, I am sure that I can find another *crack* pilot who would be willing to take the job.” Smiling coyly, Bentre brushed past the man, and punched the button by exit ramp. With a hiss, the door opened, and the man was assaulted by the briny smell of the sea.

As his eyes adjusted to the natural sunlight, he first observed children playing in the street. A boy was chasing a girl, a gleeful smile upon his face and dirt in his hair. The girl screamed and giggled as she circled around a crate, only to double-back with a joyful squeal as the boy came around the other side. It almost made Bentre yearn for a more peaceful time.

There will be plenty of time for daydreams later, Bentre shook his head. He had a job to do here. Walking past the two kids, he saw the road was a dead end. There were several elderly adults, and more than a few men wearing dirty bandages and clothing.

“Credits for a family man?” The nearest man, an abnormally tall, thin fellow shook a cup at the Corellian. Bentre noted it did not rattle in the least. The Sith looked at the man for a moment, before leaning forward and spitting in the cup.

“What do you think you are doing!?” Stahoes could not help from raising his voice. “Is this what you people have been reduced to? Are you people really content to just sit around and hope for good fortune to fall into your laps?” He snarled at the small and now-wide-eyed group. “Take control of your destiny, like the men that you are. My people have jobs and food aplenty for men of skill or ability. Go out, tell your fellow *bums* that fortune has finally shined upon them. Tell men and women alike that hope and deliverance have come to your planet.” In his minds eyes, Bentre saw himself as one of those con-men, who offered joy and prosperity if only you gave up your *material* possessions. He tried to turn his tone from angry to hopeful and awe-inspiring. “Turn yourself from the ruin of Dominion. The Disciples of Sadow will take you into their fold, and into their protection.” Bentre’s eyes flashed and he smiled widely. “Or if you turn to the usurpers, they will prove your destruction.”

One of the men cowered for a moment. It seemed as though he were torn between running or fighting. Bentre flexed his muscles, allowing the emotion to run high in his chest. He needed to be as charismatic as possible, a feat he was unused to outside of with Devil’s Shroud. With a cry, the man charged forward, a rusted knife in his hand.

“Now!” Stahoes couldn’t help but laugh. “That is just *too* cute!!” Throwing out his flesh-and-blood hand, Bentre let a lance of white light loose from his hand. The man fell to the ground with a scream of unexpected pain. The men suddenly became very white-faced as the Sith walked up to the man and kicked away his knife. Reaching down to his belt, the Corellian pulled up his

lightsaber, flourishing it tauntingly before igniting the sapphire beam. Slowly, he lowered the weapon, bringing it as near as he could to the man's throat without making contact. "Don't be like this poor man, my dear people. Choose life, that you might live it more abundantly! Don't think me a cruel taskmaster for this one man's sake." With a slight frown, Stahoes brought the weapon down, separating head from body. He heard an audible gasp from the oldest of the men.

"What are you doing?" he heard the whisper from behind him.

"I am making it quite clear, little buddy. Gather your people, let the word spread that we need people to defend your planet. If we do not get personnel, many on your planet will meet terrible fates, at our hands or that of the Dominion. Choose the victors in the long fight. Again, I say, gather your people here, and let's deliver your planet from the ruin to come."

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