

Kz'set diPlagia - #13299

"You would think someone who depends on secrecy and not being discovered by the larger galaxy come up with decent data encryption." Kz'set mused to himself as he made the last few adjustments to his program to hack into the enemy's military communications and data streams. In truth, it had taken him a fair bit of effort to get into the enemy's systems, but to the Verpine, it still seemed routine and unchallenging. Most hacks were, but that didn't stop him from hoping that someone would actually test his abilities. This endeavour didn't, and that disappointed him.

"Well, let's see what we have here," Kz'set buzzed as his chitin covered fingers clicked away at the console in front of him. Getting into a system was only the first challenge, figuring out its data structure was another thing altogether. One had to do a dance through piles and piles of irrelevant data to find material that was interesting. Troop readiness reports, didn't matter once they were engaged. Vehicle maintenance records, who cared if someone didn't document a shorted tertiary system properly. Foodstuff requisitions, who really needed that much Jogan fruit anyway? Logistics files, routine stuff, power packs, spare parts, weapons, blaster rifles...now that was interesting.

Kz'set's antennae perked up when he noticed a particular entry on recent weapon acquisitions. The items in questions, T-7 ion disruptors, weren't particularly easy to get a hold of. They were also powerful anti-vehicle and even anti-starfighter weaponry and had particularly unpleasant effects on organic life forms. Well, at least that's what he'd heard, and if the Imperial Senate saw fit to ban them he wasn't going to doubt the stories. Kz'set quickly concluded that these weapons couldn't be allowed to remain in the hands of the enemy. If he could seize them on his own initiative, it could be very important for his own plans. Now it was just a matter of finding them. A few more taps of the console revealed what platoon they'd been assigned to. Another series of commands got him into the transport launch schedules, then the flight plans, landing coordinates, there they are. The Verpine twitched his antennae, sending a message via his natural radio links to his droids.

*"Ready my shuttle, quietly."*

=====

While it was somewhat difficult to find a landing zone in which he and his squad of droids could set down safely and stealthily, Kz'set had managed to do so only a few kilometers from his target. Navigating through the raging battlefield was far more of a challenge than finding a way through the computer system which he got his intelligence from. Computers, despite their sophistication, generally weren't shooting at you while you tried to access them and explosions had the ability to distract even the most focused mind. Still, Kz'set pressed on as getting those ion disruptors away from the enemy could change this battle.

In fact, it could change a lot more than this battle.

After slogging up a small ridge, Kz'set called for a halt at a vantage point a few hundred meters from the coordinates he'd located. With only a glance and a thought, the eight B2 droids assumed a defensive position while the pair of BX units that Kz'set usually deployed with him joined him on behind a nearby rock. All three pulled out electrobinoculars and started surveying the area. It looked like a typical formation to control a chokepoint. Sentries covered the rear, others watched over a ridge that provided an excellent firing position to the sandy plains below. Upon closer inspection, Kz'set confirmed the presence of the T-7s. Looking to the BX units, Kz'set buzzed.

"What do you think, left flank or right?"

"I think you need to be a bit more subtle when sneaking off a ship you were told to stay on, insect."

Kz'set whipped around to see Selika Roh and a full squad of troops right behind him. The Wrath looked him with an especially icy stare, even for her, menace in her eyes.

The Verpine issued a piercing glare right back as he clicked in reply, "I don't need your permission to do anything, Roh. Just like you didn't seem to need to when our positions were reversed."

"Perhaps, but it's generally polite to ask before you go off and forcefully appropriate Clan property for your own use," Selika answered. She might have expected a look of surprise on Kz'set's face at the accusation, but the Verpine showed none. It only made sense she, or more likely Teylas, made sure someone was monitoring him given the nature of their mission. Some of his kin were known to be among the so-called Undesirables they were after.

"I know what you're going to do with them, Roh," Kz'set buzzed. "You're not using them as anti-vehicle weapons as they were intended. You know what they do to organics, it seems like your style."

Selika chuckled slightly at the comment. "Of course it is, but I never expected you of all people to be concerned. You've seen and done far worse."

She wasn't wrong, torture and painful death had become something he'd become quite adept at. T-7's caused gruesome, painful deaths, but it wasn't something he hadn't been fully willing to do before. Something was different now, this wasn't just about killing the usual enemies they'd fought before. This wasn't about torturing some wayward slave or soldier, that he had no problem with. This was about something far simpler, about one of the few lines he still had, despite all that he'd done. One he wouldn't cross or allow to be crossed while he still had the power to stop it.

“Not to my own kind Roh, not to my own kind. Not to those whose only crime is being different. Pravus is...”

“The Grandmaster of the Brotherhood,” Selika interjected. “And whatever our personal preferences might be, our duty is to exterminate the Undesirables, all of them.”

“Duty? You’re doing it because it’s fun.” Kz’set retorted.

“Those two things aren’t necessarily mutually exclusive, bug. Duty can be fun, in this case, it’s really fun,” the human replied with a laugh and a twirl of her hair. “But right now you’re standing between me and my duty and I’m growing rather impatient with it.”

Knowing each other as well as they did, the two Plagueians both knew the other wouldn’t back down. Both knew this was going to end in some sort of confrontation. They knew each other’s strengths, they knew each other’s weaknesses. They were both the cunning sort, always thinking several moves ahead. They were both calculating attacks, counters and escape routes as they stared each other down. There was something, however, that neither of them had calculated into their plans, something that would disrupt all their cleverness. A mechanical shout broke the concentration of both potential combatants.

“Incoming!”

Both Dark Jedi looked up just in time to see the familiar streaks of artillery fire arcing through the air towards their position. They only had a second or two to react and both dove for the nearest cover just before the first shell impacted near them. The ridge shuttered at the impact as sand and debris were hurled into the air. Seconds later, another shell hit, this one closer to the platoon Kz’set was targeting, but still close enough to be dangerous. A moment later, another. Kz’set quickly realized that it was no longer safe to be in this position.

Transmitting a command to the droids to follow, Kz’set started to run down the ridge they climbed to get to a vantage point, trying to put as much distance and obstruction as possible between him and the artillery fire. Several of the B2s were damaged in the retreat, and one was destroyed. But both Kz’set and the BXs managed to get clear of the barrage. He’d lost sight of Selika in the chaos, but he fully realized that going back was unwise. If he knew her at all, this was far from the end of the conflict. He wasn’t sure he could go back at all at this point, but at least he had time to plot his next move.

For the first time in a very long time though, he had no idea what that was.