

**Unknown Sith Space**  
**Victory II-Class Star Destroyer *Paladin***  
**Research Labs, High Containment Lab, Sub-level 2**

Aul gripped the micropipette tightly in his right hand as he gently brought its tip close to the sample tube. The transparent liquid inside seemed innocuous enough, hardly discernible from water. As unassuming as it was, Aul was acutely aware that he was handling a neurotoxin so dangerous that the few tens of microliters he was dispensing was sufficient to kill ten times the number of people currently aboard the *Paladin*. He was in little danger, as he had been highly trained for many years in doing this sort of experiment, but that did almost nothing to quell his nerves. So long as he remained calm and handled the toxin carefully, nothing was likely to go wrong.

Just as Aul finished dispensing the liquid and capping the tube, he sensed a rumble above his head. Looking over at the beaker next to him at the bench he noticed the solution inside forming ripples as if in response to a shock wave running through the lab.

*That's odd... there's only supposed to be a seminar right now. Why would they be doing simulations?*

Aul carefully moved over to the thermocycler and placed his sample into the instrument and set its program to run. A scream could be heard in the hallway.

*What the frak is going on?*

Aul removed his gloves and as he walked over to the door snapped them off a finger to fly into a nearby trash can. He punched the code into the high containment lab access door. The door slid up with a well-balanced *hiss*. Aul poked his head out of the lab and down the hallway both ways. At one of the hallway it appeared that the lights had gone out, with a single safety light flickering on and off as if sending a message by code. The other end of the hallway was a different story entirely. Bodies lay limp on the floor, some dismembered. A solitary student, a beautiful Arkanian girl with lightning silver hair, was pulling herself across the hallway floor, blood trailing behind her.

"Help..." came the muffled plea from the young girl.

Aul bolted down the hallway, grabbing the student by the shoulder and with amplified strength lifted her over his shoulder and ran back to the high containment lab. Blood curdling screams continued to ring out through the halls of the ship. Once past the threshold Aul punched the lock-down code into the door panel. The durasteel door slammed shut and pulled a vacuum at the seal. Internal locks could be heard closing tightly. Aul ignited his light blue lightsaber with a *snap-hiss* and destroyed the panel.

Replacing his lightsaber, he turned his attention to the girl. She was clutching her abdomen, where Aul could clearly see she had been disemboweled. Large sections of her intestines were poking out from behind her hands and portions were sliced open into large, festering and soon-to-be septic wounds. She was doomed.

“Come now, beautiful. What’s your name?” Aul asked in a soothing tone.

“Eli,” the young Arkonian replied.

“Eli, you are such a darling girl. Who did this?” Aul asked, trying to get the answers he needed before it was too late, but also without stressing the girl too much.

“It... was... *Pravus*,” Eli sputtered, as her blood pressure finally dropped and she lost consciousness.

Aul’s mind reeled. He knew the new Grand Master had a distaste for certain member of the Brotherhood, but surely he was better than attacking members on an academic ship? Especially such young ones? What threat could they pose? The human was at a loss for words.

“The blood leads into this lab,” came a militaristic call from just outside the door.

“The door is locked, get the explosives,” another voice added.

Aul looked around the room urgently. He was clearly going to be outnumbered and if it was Pravus who commanded this action then these were certainly well trained men. He wouldn’t be able to take them in melee combat and the lab was too small to set a defensive position. He rushed to the thermocycler and retrieved his sample tube. His experiment was surely ruined, but survival was the only thing on his mind.

Aul rushed across the lab, grabbing a handful of syringes on the way and hid in the development darkroom at the far end of the space. He loaded and primed as many syringes as he could with the sample mixture that still contained active neurotoxin.

The door slammed to the floor in a cloud of metallic smoke as a cadre of Grand Master’s Royal Guard marched into the room.

“This is Aul’s work. He’s not an Undesirable,” muttered one of the intruders.

“Look,” replied another as he pointed at Eli’s lifeless body, “he may not be one himself but he is clearly sympathetic. That falls in the criteria, he is to be eliminated.”

“Roger.”

The trespassers began to make their way through the lab, knocking over experiments and poking through various items with their weapons along the way. Aul's heart was racing and he felt a sense of urgent doom as they came closer and closer to his location. He called on the Force to fuel his reserves and pooled the energies into calming his center and the rest was shunted into his musculature.

Without a running start, Aul lunged forward at a low crouch. Pushing himself forward with all his might he slid across the ground on his chest, his arms held in front of him as if he were flying. Each hand clutched a loaded syringe. As he passed a pair of Guards he solidly jammed the needles of the syringes into their calves and sunk the plunger. Within seconds the Guards cried out in agony, began to convulse and fell to the ground limp and lifeless.

"There, go!" commanded one of the assailants.

Aul waited a moment before jumping up just as the next attacker rounded the corner around a lab bench. Aul, brandishing another syringe from his belt, lunged the needle into the Guard's eye, a squelching noise coming from the iris as it parted ways for the metal tip. Blood instantly began to ooze from the Guard's nose and he, too, fell to the ground.

Without looking at the final Guard, Aul funneled energy into his right hand and threw a final syringe, directing its high speed trajectory with the Force. The needle hit the Guard squarely in the temple, causing him to seize and fall to the ground.

Aul looked around him, his chest heaving and sweat dripping down his face. He grabbed his notebooks and a few precious samples and headed for the door. He ran full blast to the lab sector escape pod hatches. As he closed the hatch of his pod behind him, he pulled his comlink out and dialed in the frequency for the Naga Sadow summit.

The escape pod snapped off the ship with a clank, and spiraled out into open space.