

**Smokey's Cantina,
Ohmen City,
Judecca,
34 ABY**

A fog of tobacco and drug smoke filled the room, along with idle chatter and holonews, while the Quarren sat at his booth. A shot glass in one hand, and a large cigar in the other, his eyes closed as he was in deep reflection. Clustered together were two empty bottles of the same concoction he was using, but Lexiconus was collected and focused, not drunk. With a soft exhale, a wisp of smoke rolling from his lips and into the air, while the Quarren slowly took another shot of his rum. But something about the Quaestor was off, and his tired, saddened eyes showed this. He dropped the cigar into the tray and rubbed his eye and forehead.

No, please. Stop it.

Flashes of red appeared in his memories. A wailing scream drilled into his sanity. He could still feel the tug at his arm, the nails digging into his skin. Nurses repeating orders as the beeps of the heart monitor trailed away. With a heavy slap onto his face, Lexiconus brought himself back into the room, and he toked on the cigar again. The screams still persisted. Nothing could make them fade away, as much as he tried. The Quaestor thought it best to turn his attention to something else, so as he poured another rum shot he glanced at the holonews feed and turned his focus onto that.

"...millions of military lives were lost in the campaign named Operation Shattered Ties. The people and tourists around me today have consolidated with each other for this special moment. Holding hands, sharing comforting words and even a comforting tissue, it is clear that the men and women lost in this skirmish against pirates, will never be forgotten. Jean Wildeby, ITN News."

It seemed everywhere he turned, people were speaking and discussing about the skirmish that happened lightyears away. Like it was the Empire's fault, like it was the leader's fault. Like it was Lexic's fault.

Not again. No, stop.

His claws hit and scratched his forehead deep, as he tried to push back the memories again, flashes of red and screams penetrating his consciousness. As a route of escape, Lexiconus reached out to the bottle and began to drink the burning fluid. Gulp after gulp, his throat raged with a fire that destroyed him, with tears falling from his eyes. The Quarren dropped the bottle onto the table, splashes of rum littering the surface, and coughed violently into his hand. He felt broken and useless, but maybe that was the drink kicking in. A familiar presence caught his attention from behind and approached him, Lexiconus didn't bother to clean up.

"You know," Delak's voice sliced through the commotion. "If you wanted to have a good time, I could have taught you." The Shadow Guard leader offered as he sat down, but his gaze caught the sight of the tearing Quarren. He wasn't feeling so cocky anymore.

"I'm not here to pull an all nighter, Krennel!" Lexiconus bit back, quickly wiping his eyes dry. But the tough guy appearance didn't sink with Delak.

"Clearly sir, so why are..." The Quaestor interrupted him. "I lost three good men today. All commanders who served with you and I. First was Commander Rych, in charge of the demolition and special forces squad. They found him half gone under an armoured vehicle. Brought back through hyperspace to me for a life-saving cybernetic operation. But he bled out. Second was Colonel Ak'Toin, in charge of strategic and counter-terrorism movements. His head received lots of shrapnel when his bunker exploded. Got the shakes, couldn't survive it." Lexiconus sighed heavily, then toked on his cigar again, the smoke consuming the two men in a second of hidden tranquility from the world. But the Quarren wasn't finished.

"Then there was Sergeant Gorge. Best damn soldier with a sniper I've ever seen. You'd think he was a Force sensitive, but we never got round to testing him. He bled for hours on our table, raged about with his arms. He threw our nurses about like ragdolls, as if in dire pain and fear. We tried tranquilising him but the device got broken. I took a look inside him and there it was. Metal penetrating his liver and rotting it from the inside." The Quaestor froze in his words and swallowed back some bile, his face turning pale. Then decided to continue. "His blood couldn't be cleaned, he was losing hydration and his stomach started to swell like a pregnant lady. He had the most agonising death you could think of, and I couldn't save or ease him." Lexic's eyes began to flood again, as he grabbed his bottle back and began to gulp more. Delak knew how he felt, as he too lost good men. The Human quickly grabbed the bottle back from his superior and looked him in the eyes.

"It's time to put this behind you, you cannot save everyone." Lexiconus' eyes furrowed as his mouth started to snarl, anger built inside him. His orange fists slammed against the wooden table as the Quarren roared out.

"But I will try my Force-damned hardest! No one will tell me otherwise, and I will succeed against death! I promise you that, Human." Spittle erupted from his mouth as the Quaestor snarled. Delak understood his passion, after all they were both strong Sith. So he nodded in agreement to avoid further confrontation.

"How about another round? On me." The newly appointed Battlemaster offered, credits falling from his hand and onto the table. But as Lexiconus wiped his face down with a towel, he exited the booth and refused with a head shake. The Quaestor stormed from the room and headed into the night.

I will best you, death. I will.