**Mimosa-Inahj Homestead**

**Karufr**

Although it was carved into the side of a mountain, the home of the Mimosa-Inahj family had not survived the bombardment of Karufr intact. Large chunks of the mountain itself had been dislodged, exposing the duracrete walls of the homestead to further attack.

“Raise anyone!” Kooki ordered, two wailing toddlers in her arms. The girls had been fast asleep when the bombardment began.

“I’m trying! There’s no answer from the Great Hall!” Andrelious replied, desperately flicking through all of the clan’s communication channels.

“So they’re no help! Fine, I’ll get these two to safety myself! Come on, girls!” the Alderaanian female shouted as she skilfully wrapped the twins in their carrier. Before her husband could answer, she headed for the door with a sense of purpose.

*She’s got her own plan.* Andrelious thought.

The bombardment appeared to have finished, or at least moved onto another part of Taldryan’s home system, but the damage was done. Andrelious could sense death on a planetary scale, but he could also feel that the clan’s Elders had survived, even if he couldn’t contact them.

Pushing another button on his holocommunicator, the Warlord widened his broadcast to cover every possible frequency. If anybody, friend or foe, was searching for survivors, they would find Andrelious.

“This is Mimosa-Inahj. Has anybody else survived out there?” Andrelious said, more in hope than expectation.

To the Warlord’s surprise, a holographic figure appeared. He couldn’t recognise the man, but he wasn’t dressed in the uniform of the Taldryan military, nor did he carry anything that identified him as a member of the clan.

“So, Mr Inahj. You survived. That’s not going to do at all. You’re one of Lord Pravus’ best Inquisitors. You know things that we would rather you didn’t broadcast,” the man stated, twirling a small dagger around in his fingers. Andrelious recognised it immediately: he had the exact same weapon.

“Why was I not warned of this attack? I was perfectly happy to go along with what Pravus wanted!” Andrelious snapped in reply.

The man’s neutral expression was unmoved. “Being a good little boy isn’t what doomed you, Mr Inahj. A man is known by the company he keeps. Clan Taldryan and its obstinate Elders have proven to be most troublesome. I am sorry, Mr Inahj, but there is no place for you, or your family, in the new order.”

“Why don’t you come down here and prove it? You too are a Grand Inquisitor. I didn’t think Pravus had time for cowards,” the Warlord hissed.

“I’m not getting my hands dirty, Mr Inahj. But don’t you worry. The Iron Legion now have a fix on your location. Perhaps you should have kept quiet. Don’t make too much noise when they arrive. I wouldn’t want your daughters to hear their father’s dying screams,” the man taunted. Before the Taldryanite could answer, he disappeared.

*Good. They think Kooki and the twins are still here!* Andrelious thought.

**Karufr Mountains**

**10 kilometres from Mimosa-Inahj homestead**

“Looks like Ketcher’s intel is accurate. We’ve just confirmed that Andrelious Mimosa-Inahj has survived. Seems he and his family were at home,” Captain Crespa stated. He and his men were patrolling the mountains in search of survivors.

“So what’s the plan, sir?” an armour clad soldier questioned.

“Stick with the mission profile. *ALL* Taldryan survivors are to be exterminated,” Crespa ordered.

“I can’t believe anyone would choose to live in these mountains. They’re so cold!” another soldier complained.

“The Iron Legion doesn’t feel the cold! Onward, men! We’ll be there within the hour!” Crespa barked

**Mimosa-Inahj homestead**

The mysterious Inquisitor’s promise that the Iron Legion were on their way pressed Andrelious into immediate action. He was equipped with his entire arsenal of weapons, and the Warlord was busying himself with packing undamaged items into storage crates. His efforts to contact other members of Taldryan, or its military, were still proving fruitless, but he had activated the homestead’s distress beacon.

The bombardment had destroyed the heating system, so Andrelious was finding the atmosphere increasingly chilly.

A sudden crackle from the holocommunicator startled the Warlord so much that he stepped back onto one of the twins’ building blocks. Crying out as the block’s sharp corner dug into his foot, Andrelious lost his balance, falling to the floor.

The familiar hologram of Howlader, Taldryan’s Consul, appeared in the middle of the front room. “Andrelious! No time to be laying around! We’ve just received your distress call. Are your family still with you?”

“No. Kooki took the twins. From the way she rushed off, I think she’s got a plan of her own. I’m just here packing some things. How are things looking?” the Warlord questioned.

“Not good. We’ve already had to leave Yacks behind. Our armed forces are completely destroyed. For all we know, you and Kooki might be the only other survivors. We’ll get to you as soon as we can. Just watch out. The planet’s crawling with enemy troops,” Howlader explained.

“I’m aware. One of Pravus’ Grand Inquisitors has already ordered some my way. Unless they’re unfortunate enough to run into Kooki, I’m going to be ready for them. Anything else I need to know?” Andrelious asked.

“The fleet’s been destroyed as well. Once we pick you up, we’ll need to figure out a way to get past the Iron Fleet’s blockade. With you and Halcyon, we’ve got two of the best pilots in the Brotherhood. So be ready to fly!” the Consul instructed.

**1 hour later**

The homestead was now almost as cold as it was outside. Andrelious was wearing four layers of clothing, but still shivered a little as he waited for either rescue or attack. He kept his holocommunicator active, ready for if Howlader, or another surviving ally, was able to speak to him.

The Warlord was beginning to sense several life forms nearby. They lacked a strong imprint, so he doubted that they were Force sensitive, but he could also sense a strong sense of camaraderie. Whoever was approaching knew each other well.

Electing not to wait, the Sith slipped out of the homestead’s front door. He immediately spotted a dozen armour clad troopers a short distance away. One of them appeared to be carrying some kind of rocket launcher.

One of the troopers, likely their commander, pointed over in the direction of Andrelious. The trooper armed with the rocket launcher aimed carefully, before firing a rocket directly at the Warlord.

*Really?* Andrelious thought to himself, nudging the rocket with the Force. The diverted warhead collided with the top of a nearby mountain, exploding with such heat that it flash melted the nearby snow.

Activating his lightsaber, Andrelious began to march towards the troopers. The heavy weapons specialist was fiddling with his rocket launcher, desperately trying to reload it, whilst his colleagues moved into combat formation, ready to face off against the furious Taldryanite.

The Warlord had a little knowledge of the workings of Pravus’ Iron Legion, mostly from his time serving as a Grand Inquisitor. He knew that they were better trained against Force users than the average soldier, and that most Iron Legion troops was trained on more than one type of weapon. He also suspected that there were a great deal more troops on the way; when you were a target of the Iron Legion, they stopped at nothing until you were neutralised.

“Attack formation seven!” Captain Crespa ordered. His men wordlessly obeyed, all whilst Andrelious continued to approach.

Blaster fire filled the air with hyphens of deadly plasma. Andrelious swung his lightsaber, arcing it through the unfortunate soldier at the front of the formation. Iron Legion armour was tough, but stood no chance against the lightsaber of an angry Sith. Now among his enemy, Mimosa-Inahj quickly eliminated another trio of troopers.

“Fall back!” Crespa commanded, turning to run but still taking pot shots at the Warlord. The remaining troopers also took flight, easily outpacing Andrelious. “Next phase!” the Captain continued.

One of the troopers reached down to their belt, arming and throwing a thermal detonator in the direction of the Taldryanite Sith. Spotting the explosive, Andrelious dove forwards, landing several feet away on a blanket of thick snow. The thermal detonator exploded, melting a large amount of nearby snow, as well as launching more snow into the air. Some of the snow pelted Andrelious in the face.

*Even when Kooki’s not around I end up having the stuff all over me!* Andrelious thought.

Seeing the Sith on the ground, Crespa and his men stopped their retreat and resumed firing. The heavy weapons specialist had finally reloaded his rocket launcher, and aimed at his target, pausing to allow the rocket’s guidance systems to lock on. Without hesitating, the man fired, watching as the rocket’s trajectory took it directly towards Andrelious. He wasn’t expecting much; a guidance system was unlikely to be enough to overcome the Warlord’s ability to steer the rocket with the Force, but he was more than aware that the act of dealing with the rocket left Andrelious vulnerable to attack from his comrades.

Pushing the rocket away, Andrelious found himself pinned down by blaster fire. His shorter height made him a smaller target than many, but Iron Legion soldiers were good shots and the Warlord was forced to remain crouched on the ground to avoid the near constant volley of plasma directed at him. He pulled out his own blaster and fired several shots. The Sith’s shooting was even more accurate: two more of the Iron Legion were quickly felled.

**War Room**

**Executor-class Star Dreadnaught *Suffering***

“Captain Crespa’s detachment is having difficulty,” Lieutenant Fewag declared.

Ketcher frowned. “As I’d expect, Lieutenant. Like most of Taldryan, Inahj is a veteran. What’s the status of the reinforcements?”

“An old Imperial-style AT-AT is headed Crespa’s way. It’ll arrive in five minutes. Will that be enough?” Fewag questioned.

Enoch Ketcher examined the map. The Inquisitor would have liked to have been on the surface of Karufr himself, but Lord Cotelin’s orders demanded otherwise. Having already lost the service of one Grand Inquisitor, namely Andrelious, the Justicar didn’t want to risk losing another in battle. Instead, Cotelin ordered Ketcher to direct the battles against surviving Taldryan members. Having already failed to successfully deal with the clan’s Elders, the Inquisitor was hoping for a result against the troublesome Mimosa-Inahj family.

“One other thing, sir. Kookimarissia and the children weren’t in the family home. We’re not sure where they went,” Fewag explained.

“They can’t go far, Lieutenant. Do you think we’re not going to be able to deal with a mother and two toddlers? Once Inahj is neutralised, we’ll deal with Mimosa. Just remember, Operation Childminder requires that we get those twins *alive*,” Ketcher ordered.

“This whole thing chills me out, sir. What could the Dark Lord want with those twins?” the Lieutenant replied.

The question was too much for Ketcher. Snarling, he turned to Fewag, clenching his right hand into a fist.

“One more word out of line, Lieutenant, and I’ll see to it that you’re demoted to a frakking target drone! I will not see Lord Pravus’ orders questioned by the likes of a glorified caf boy!” the Sith bellowed.

**Surface of Karufr**

The Iron Legion were proving a tougher than Andrelious had hoped. He had so far managed to avoid serious injury, but the remaining soldiers, though reduced in number, were fighting on with an almost beast-like resolve. The Warlord could sense a strong bond linking the remaining men, almost as if they were limbs on the same body.

*Battle meditation. No wonder they cut their way through so easily. I’ll bet that Inquisitor I spoke to is an expert at it.* Andrelious realised.

Ducking another volley of blaster fire, the Sith weaved his way towards another enemy, piercing his lightsaber through the soldier’s chest. His hatred for what Pravus and his followers had done drove him on, though his desire to keep Kooki and the twins safe was still firmly at the front of his mind.

Eventually, Andrelious caught up with and cut down the penultimate enemy, the heavy weapons specialist, leaving him alone with the unit’s commander.

“This is my home. Go. Tell Pravus and all of his false Sith followers that the Mimosa-Inahj family aren’t going anywhere. Especially not to hell,” the Warlord hissed, already knowing that his opponent’s conditioning left them virtually deaf to any enemy speech.

“Most impressive. But I hear that you’re basically the family’s housekeeper. I’m sure that *Kooki* would have already killed us all,” Crespa responded, his helmet’s comlink not fully rinsing the sarcasm from his tone.

With a roar, Andrelious lunged for his target. The Captain smirked under his helmet and timed a backwards roll to perfection, leaving the Sith’s lightsaber cutting through thin air. As he returned to his feet, Crespa armed himself with an electrostaff.

“You may have cleared my men away, but I am an anti-lightsaber specialist. I was actually sent to deal with your wife. Perhaps I still will,” Crespa taunted.

As he moved to engage Crespa, Andrelious heard a pounding noise in the distance. With grim realisation, the Warlord remembered the sound immediately; it was the unmistakable sound of an AT-AT Walker making an approach.

*I need to finish this. Quickly!*

Crespa made the most of the Taldryanite’s hesitation, slamming his electrostaff into Andrelious’ lightsaber blade. Though he wasn’t Force sensitive, the Captain was both agile and strong, making him a very tough opponent. Mimosa-Inahj, who was older and slower, was forced onto the defensive, relying on the Force to help guide his blocks and parries as the relentless Crespa tried to bash his way past.

The pounding of the AT-AT was growing nearer. Andrelious remained focused on the task at hand, slowly turning the duel from a test of swiftness to one that relied more on stamina; he could feel that Crespa, who had already spent several hours trekking through the snow, was beginning to tire. With that in mind, Mimosa-Inahj aimed to frustrate the Captain’s efforts at a breakthrough while offering plenty of counter-attacks that sough to further exhaust his enemy.

Ducking an almost wild swing of Crespa’s electrostaff, Andrelious waited until the soldier was at full stretch and slashed his lightsaber towards his opponent’s back. The lightsaber made no contact with any part of Crespa’s body; that wasn’t the Taldryanite’s target. Instead, it sliced directly through a large white rucksack on the Captain’s back. The rucksack sparked as it was hit, indicating that it was carrying some kind of electrical equipment.

“Destroying my cold weather backpack won’t help you! I’ll be long clear of these frakking mountains before I even *begin* to feel the cold!” Crespa teased.

Andrelious ignored the comment. He attacked the Captain, trying to evade the electrostaff’s lightsaber-proof tips. Crespa, used to such tactics, stepped back, forcing the Warlord’s crimson blade to crash uselessly into the field of current.

Stepping back to avoid another lunge from his enemy, Crespa found his foot slipping deep into a pile of snow. To his horror, he realised that he’d walked into some kind of snow-filled rut. He steadied himself, but Andrelious made the most of the momentary loss of balance, and slashed his lightsaber through the trooper’s right arm.

As the electrostaff dropped to the ground nearby, still in the grip of Crespa’s severed hand, Mimosa-Inahj held his lightsaber blade within half an inch of Crespa’s head.

“Right. You were the commander of this particular branch of the so-called Iron Legion. You’re probably going to just be an incredible burden, but I’ll let the Elders decide what to do with you. I’m sure that *they* have a way of making you talk,” Andrelious declared, keeping his lightsaber perfectly still.

“None of you are even going to get off this planet alive. Let alone be in any condition to interrogate *anyone*,” Crespa spat back.

The AT-AT was now nearly in range. Andrelious glanced towards the approaching walker, unsure as to if its crew would dare fire on an ally, albeit a captured one.

Rotating its head, the large vehicle was clearly preparing to fire. The Warlord pulled Crespa towards him, intending to use his prisoner as a Human shield.

Suddenly, a large ship flew into view. It immediately began firing its laser cannons at the enemy AT-AT, almost immediately destroying it.

“I told you we would get here!” Howlader stated almost cheerfully. “Just you wait until you hear who’s behind all this!”

“I have no time for guessing games, Consul. Just pick me up. And get a containment unit ready. I’ve secured us a prisoner,” Andrelious declared.

*FIN*