

JORM NA'TREJ

EXCIDIVM



REVERSAL

A FICTION FOR CSP'S EXCURSION EVENT

*Pressure, sections Zero through Eight, nominal.*

*Temperature, sections Zero through Eight, twenty-two degrees standard, nominal.*

*Atmosphere, sections Zero through Eight, standard oxygen-nitrogen-mix with trace elements, nominal.*

*Artificial gravity, sections Zero through Eight, one standard Coruscant acceleration, nominal.*

*All generators, fans and filters show green lights.*

*All life support systems are operational.*

Ensign Jelen Ducar did not report her console's readouts. Lieutenant Commander Mennet had instructed her to keep quiet until something changed. And so she bit her tongue, updated the timestamps in the telemetry log, and did her best to ignore the faint reflection that stared back at her from the screen.

But as hard as she pretended to not notice the image, and the more she tried to ignore the details, she *knew* that the pretty face with the bitten lip had a light earthen tint, the hair gathered in a strict ponytail was of a dark chocolate color, and the horns rising at the hairline were itching.

She saw a scared young Zabrak. She saw a servant of the Empire. She saw herself.

She looked away, her gaze darting through the command center that served as the medical station *Tipoca II*'s brain. The room's subdued lighting was tainted with red and revealed little of her colleagues, hunched over their consoles as she was herself. Her own console was usually staffed by a droid, but emergency protocols demanded an officer's presence. Only the Stormtroopers flanking the exits were easily visible, their armor painted in a disquieting arterial red by the lights.

In the middle of the command center, Lt. Commander Mennet stood, grey uniform camouflaged by the clash of the alarm lighting and the blue shine of the holo-tank he was studying. A stout human in his forties with pale skin and an impressive moustache, he stroked his waning chin in deep thought. As if he felt her eyes upon him, he shot her a quick get-back-to-work glance. She obliged.

*Pressure, nominal.*

*Temperature, nominal.*

*Atmosphere, nominal.*

*Artificial gravity, nominal.*

*All generators, fans and filters show green lights.*

*All life support systems are operational.*

The main access doors slid open and admitted a Stormtrooper. The pauldron on his shoulder identified him as a Sergeant. He escorted a tall man in civilian garb. Mennet turned and furrowed his bushy black brow upon beholding the visitor's easy smile. He accepted a few quiet words and a datapad from the Sergeant, though.

Jelen could see him a double take as he read it. Then he read it another time, his lips moving silently with the text. Then he snapped to attention.

“Sir, I apologize. I had no idea...”

“Stow it,” the visitor interrupted Mennet with a throw-away gesture.

“Those pretty red light ain’t shining for no reason. Fill me in, will ya?”

“As you wish,” Mennet gulped.

“Nine minutes ago, a Corvette dropped out of hyperspace,” he said as he led the newcomer to the holo-tank which depicted the situation.

“Apparently they did not expect to find us here. They stopped and scanned us instead of bolting or moving to attack outright. We sent a tightbeam distress signal to our ships, but if my intel is correct, none of them is closer than an hour of travel.”

Mennet briefly clenched his teeth before he continued.

“Five minutes ago, they hailed us, audio only. The Captain declared his intention to ‘do some shopping,’ and we should ‘open a tab’ in his name.”

He emphasized the quotes with obvious contempt.

The tall man flicked a braid of many back over his shoulder and magnified the Corvette’s image, turning it between his hands and exposing it to his scrutiny.

“Yeah, that’s like them. See these marks? Pirates. Not a local gig, but independents - no gang covering their backs. Small fries.”

Jelen bit her lip hard enough to draw blood. Mennet faced away and cursed in some dialect unknown to her before turning back to his guest.

“What the hell do they want from us? We’re just an unarmed medical station!”

The visitor nodded.

“Exactly. Bacta, painkillers, medic-droids... that stuff is worth its weight in gold on the black market. With that Hosnian stunt the First Order pulled and the war folks see on the horizon, prices are *soaring*. Small time gang like those chuckleheads could get set for life with a haul like this station offers.”

Mennet punched into his open hand in a way that betrayed both his frustration and his helplessness. The guest held up a finger, forestalling further comments. Jelen sought distraction in her duties.

*Pressure, nominal.*

*Temperature, nominal.*

*Atmosphere, nominal.*

*Artificial gravity, nominal.*

*All generators, fans and filters show green lights.*

*All life support systems are operational.*

Suddenly, two hands topped her screen, framing a torso clad in what Jelen recognized as a Quenk Jazz festival shirt, topped by a grinning head covered in cornrows and braids.

“Hello, little girl. You and me are gonna play a game.”

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NoYondu grinned, yellowed teeth behind blue lips. Ritual scars covered his face and the sides of his head, where they framed a red mohawk. Behind him, better than thirty members of his crew brandished a collection of weapons ranging from the mundane to the exotic, yet all arriving at ‘deadly.’

Before him, the airlock opened, revealing three humanoid figures. Two were the metallic forms of protocol droids. The last one was a tall man in baggy, long-sleeved scrubs.

“Now this looks like a guy who lost a coin toss. Waddaya say boys? We take him for a little walk?”

NoYondu’s hoarse question was answered by rowdy shouts, rebel yells, and laughter. All around him, his men and women - honorary men as far as his speech went - poured from the Corvette *Reaver* into the station, surrounding the droids and the lone man as their leader confronted the residents.

“So, boy. What didya bet on? Heads or tails?”

“Neither,” the man answered calmly, but smiling. “We drew straws.”

NoYondu stepped closer and poked his finger sternly into the other man’s breastbone.

“And what are you smiling about, boy?”

“I’m from Hutt space. Being raided... that’s almost a throwback to the good old days. Or I’m just nostalgic,” the answer came.

NoYondu stared a moment, then he broke out in laughter and slapped the guy on the shoulder.

“Tell ya what; keep up that calm and your good humor, and ya’ll get outta this just fine. Now, I’d like ya to point me to the bridge of this hunk. These droids’ll lead my Lieutenants to the main medical storage and to whatever counts as armory here. Got it?”

The man nodded his bronze-skinned head and relayed the appropriate orders to the droids. NoYondu’s party split three ways as they followed their involuntary guides deeper into the station. Surrounded by a remaining short dozen shaggy sentients and their Captain, the man in scrubs led the way.

“So tell me, boy,” NoYondu demanded, “where’s the guards? And ain’t this whole place lookin’ understaffed and horribly out of place to boot?”

“We don’t have a lot of guards aboard, and those are more orderlies than anything else,” the guide responded.

“The docs told them to stand down, and to us nurses, their word counts more than the officers’.”

A short pause.

“As for the lack of people... we’re survivors. Came from a place that went straight to every hell that’s burning hot. Few got out. Don’t ask, please.”

The nurse shook his head and continued. “Now we’re sitting here in deep space until the tugs return from their glorified shuttle detail for the higher ups, looking for new employment. Then you guys dropped on us. Docs decided to hunker down in the mess hall and sit it out, sending only a rep to test the waters and make this easy on them.”

A set of pressure doors opened up before the group, admitting them into one of the thick spars connecting the station’s Number Four section with the cylindrical core. NoYondu wrought his hands at the possibilities unfolding in his mind as he walked behind the nurse, always making sure that his guide and guards would be the first to take a shot or spring a trap. *A hospital station and even doctors, now dis is a fortune in the makin’*, he thought to himself.

Outwardly, he kept up the cordial conversation as the door shut behind them.

“That’s all good and shiny, boy...”

Suddenly, he felt dizzy. The world started spinning in his eyes and his head, as if he’d been hitting the hooch too hard - but stronger and faster. Unable to focus, he collapsed to his knees, dimly aware of his crew faring as he did. Only two figures stood tall. One of them he faintly recognized as one of his own legbreakers, a Kel Dor named Orely. The other was the nurse.

Orely screamed something and raised his scattergun, its thunder a distant roar in NoYondu’s ears, but the nurse danced - danced? Yes, danced out of harm’s way, kicking the weapon away just as the Captain fell over. A moment lasting both a blink and an eternity later, the Kel Dor crashed to the floor in his boss’ narrowing field of view, the nurse standing over him.

In what NoYondu was now certain to be the last moments of his life, he saw that creepy nurse wreath his hands in lightning. Then he bent over Orely and tazed his face.

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Lieutenant Commander Mennet wasn’t the best or the brightest the Empire had to offer, not by a far shot before the fall of Cocytus, and certainly not after. He was both loyal and diligent

though, and humble enough to accept that his career was at a dead end because he just didn't have the stuff to make it further. He didn't mind. He prided himself in being a mid-level cog in the imperial machine.

But right now, he was seriously on edge. Cocytus' fiery end had deeply uprooted him, and this pirate raid in deep space with no friendly ship close by had put him under a mountainous amount of pressure. And to top it all off, a guy looking like a pirate himself had strolled into his command center and pulled rank on him. *And not just any rank... Emperor's Hand!*

He had mixed feelings about this. He absolutely didn't like being usurped out of thin air, but he could not deny that having one of the Emperor's personal agents at his side was soothing. Neither did he like the plan that this Jorm Na'trej had whipped up, but he found solace in thinking that only the best made it to the Emperor's side and acted in his interest.

But nothing could have eased his unrest - *call it what it is, call it fear* - when the pirates started hitting the station's shields with what Na'trej called "turbolaser love-taps" while Ensign Ducar frantically worked away at her console.

Nothing could wash the bile from his throat either when he had hailed the Corvette transmitting his surrender, not even the lies about old shield generators and short-circuits that left only a few airlocks at the station's periphery operational.

Nothing could skip the wait while Na'trej had donned scrubs and taken to guiding the raiders, while Mennet and a half handful of Stormtroopers augmented by a dozen of orderlies waited behind the coreward pressure door of the spar connecting to the Number Four section.

The trooper at the door had his helmet hanging from the belt. An old school stethoscope snaked from the door into his ears. Suddenly, he raised a finger, causing everyone to grab their gear tighter and check the seat of their webbing. A second finger came up, signalling the closing of the distant door. Seconds passed.

The gunshot ringing through the door and the lead prattling against its far side really made the third signal superfluous and made the man sneer, but he balled and pumped his fist anyway while he discarded the stethoscope and picked up his helmet.

Mennet bit down on the palm-sized rebreather covering his mouth and nose. As soon as the Stormtrooper had donned his helmet, his comrade on the other side of the door keyed its controls to reveal the spar's corridor. Mennet followed his troopers in, crouching and covering the figures within with their blasters.

Only Na'trej remained standing over a man whose face was a smoldering ruin spewing smoke. Besides Mennet, his Stormtrooper Sergeant barked orders, distorted and dehumanized by the helmet's speakers.

“Disarm them and check for life signs! Orderlies, restrain the survivors! Command center, restore the normal air cycle!”

Mennet heard Ensign Ducar confirm in his comm’s earbud, but didn’t dare answer. Between the Stormtrooper’s helmet filters and handheld rebreathers, the defenders were safe from the carbon monoxide flooding the corridor. He had no idea how Na’trej handled the deadly atmosphere without such equipment, yet the men stood there and supervised the pirates’ arrest without speaking a word.

Mennet mused whether the man was just holding his breath when the fans hidden in the ceiling kicked in and refreshed the air, turning it into something breathable once more. With the pirates detained, The Emperor’s agent waved impatiently, wordlessly commanding Mennet and his troopers to follow him.

They backtracked the route the boarders had come. Roughly a third of the way, the Sergeant raised his hand to his helmet listening to something on the Stormtroopers’ network, then reported.

“Sir, the other two teams report success. The pirates walked neatly into the traps, but one of them was a Gand - they don’t breathe oxygen to begin with. He injured three, one of them critical.”

“Well, it’s the best damn place to have that happen, isn’t it?” Na’trej growled.

The teeth behind his ever-grinning lips remained clenched. Mennet, who had abandoned using the rebreather, thought he could actually smell the adrenaline in the other man’s sweat. *Something really set him off*, he mused. His suspicion was confirmed when the agent just plain ripped the scrubs off his boy, revealing his normal garb underneath. Mennet managed to spot a series of smoldering holes in the festival shirt, but no blood. He refrained from asking.

In the corridor adjacent to the airlock the *Ravager* had docked at, Na’trej rummaged through a waste bin, recovering his weapons and belt. He checked a smallish, incredibly slick looking compblock.

“Two radio calls from handheld size comms. None got through,” he announced and let the device disappear into a pouch. While Mennet still marveled at what he believed to be a compact jammer, other corridors and crossings admitted more Stormtroopers into their group.

The Sergeant looked around and then turned to his superiors.

“Thirteen Stormtroopers ready for your orders, Sirs,” he reported smartly.

“One job: nothing gets out.”

Na’trej’s order, or rather the vitriolic tone it was spoken in despite those lips still smiling, startled Mennet even though he had suspected the agent’s foul mood.

But his heart really jumped into his throat when the Emperor’s Hand stepped into the airlock and ignited a yellow blade of plasma with a soul-searing *SNAP-HISS* and a twirl.

“I’ll get compensation for my shirt. And I won’t settle cheap.”

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The tunnel of racing mottled blue and gray dissolved, making way for streaks of light converging on some point infinitely far away, before these streaks themselves collapsed into distant stars.

Braecen Kaeth, Executor of the Empire and Quaestor of House Exidium, blinked the afterimages away. As his vision cleared, he could see the *ISN Venture*’s sleek axe-shaped form from the off-center bridge. Looming before the ship just few kilometers distant he spotted the fat, segmented wheel that was *Tipoca II*. He also immediately noticed the tumor latching onto the station’s side.

No alarm klaxons sounded; they had known they’d find trouble. The shields were raised and the weapons pointed forward. Just now, a squadron of T-70 X-Wings shot from the hangar and through Braecen’s field of view, unfolding their S-foils and angling towards *Tipoca*.

“Hail the station,” the Executor commanded.

Almost immediately, the Lieutenant at the comm responded.

“My Lord, the station responds. Full holo and audio, with valid passcode.”

On a gesture of Braecen, the man routed the call to a holo-emitter close to the Dark Adept. “*Venture*, this is *Tipoca II*, Lieutenant Commander Mennet. The situation is under control, repeat, situation under control. Security code eta-six-four-nine-gamma. Do you copy?”

Braecen watched Mennet repeat himself until the comm officer gave him a thumbs-up. “I hear you, LC. Your code checks out, yet I still see that Corvette docked to the station. What happened here?”

Mennet sighed.

“Sir, we were stumbled upon and attacked by pirates. One of the Emperor’s personal agents turned up and allowed them to dock, disabling their boarding parties and then counter-boarding the Corvette. He did the latter by himself. Do you wish to talk to him?”

“An agent of the Emperor? Yes, patch me through,” Kaeth responded, wondering. *Now who do we have here? Was a Palatinaean aboard?*

His unspoken question was answered by the sound of water prattling onto metal, splashing infrequently as something in the stream moved. Or rather someone, as a voice revealed.

“You rang?”



Suddenly, Braecen found himself thankful for the lack of a picture in the relayed call. *I really don't need to see him naked.* He checked the comm code displayed though, and realized who he was talking to.

“Jorm. A lucky coincidence to meet you here. Weren't you scouting spinward?”

“Sure was, boss,” the Kiffar replied, “right until I ran low on consumables. I returned to *Tipoca* to refill my holds and upload what I gathered. Chuckleheads jumped us halfway through the refueling cycle.”

Braecen switched the settings on the holo-unit while Jorm spoke. It now displayed a camera feed. As he listened, the camera rotated and briefly showed the cannon-bearing wingtip of an X-Wing from a position above and behind the pilot, revealing the source to be an astromech droid. Then the picture zoomed in on the Corvette's bridge windows. The large glass panels were lit from within, as were the big splotches of red and green that stuck to it from the inside - in some places bright and vivid, in others darker and dry.

“I don't suppose you left survivors of that crew?” Kaeth asked his subordinate.

“Actually yes. A few folks from the boarding party survived the suffocation. They're restrained and sedated, Mennet assured me.”

“But on the ship?”

“...let's just say that ticking me off in space comes with hazards, and these folks found out,” Jorm answered.

“By the way, need a ship? I got myself a CR90 lately, lucky me. Short a crew, though. How about you come here, get the full report, and we hammer out the details over a few drinks?”

END