<Pelta Class Frigate *Abrogator*>

<Nancora Orbit>

“Brace for impact!”

Arden was already hunched over the command station as the yeoman shouted the command that had become all too familiar the last five minutes. Despite the best efforts of the frigate’s gunners, the *Abrogator* had already taken one hit from a Collective suicide bomber amidships. A second had broken through and was about to hit the rear of the ship and the Overseer was mentally counting down the seconds until it struck.

Three

Two

One

The ship shuddered violently as the explosion tore through the ship from rear to front. Arden was briefly winded as the force shoved him violently into the console in front of him. He didn’t suffer any real injury, others on the bridge weren’t so lucky. A slave crewman who hadn’t had the chance to brace had cracked his skull on the station to Arden’s left. Kicking him aside, the Overseer shouted.

“Damage report!”

The yeoman struggled to get back to his console, but a moment later managed to piece together a reply.

“Shields have failed, no response from engines, multiple hull breaches aft and amidships on decks 1 and 2, reactor…”

Arden looked impatiently towards the yeoman, but he already had a feeling he wasn’t going to like the answer. “Let me guess, not good.”

The Yeoman nodded. “Containment is holding for the moment, but we have massive coolant leaks in both the primary and secondary systems.”

Arden wasn’t the best engineer, but he knew that reactor coolant leaks were bad and quite often fatal to ships of this size. “Any chance we can kill the reactor?”

“Wouldn’t matter.” The Abrogator’s Bothan engineer piped in. “Still need coolant to keep it from going critical. Plus, emergency systems aren’t responding, so I couldn’t initiate a shutdown from here.”

“Sir,” the yeoman was about say something, but Arden raised a hand to cut him off.

“I understand.” Arden said with a nod before shooting a look back to the engineer. “Buy us as much time as possible. Keep the gunners at their posts for as long as possible. We probably can’t take another hit like that. Send our status to the Dread Lord and have Gladiator Squadron give us as much cover as possible.”

Both men nodded as Arden keyed a command into the console in front of him. A moment later, a chime came over the ship’s intercom. After a deep breath, Arden said words he’d wished he’d never have to say.

“All hands, this is the Overseer. Abandon ship. I repeat Abandon Ship.”

The bridge crew started to shout last minute orders and then started for the escape pods. Arden eyed the two troopers that made up his personal guard, one of which showed clear signs of a shoulder injury. He could have given the order with just his eyes, but he said it out loud anyway, grabbing his rifle from under his command station.

“Get me to a pod. Now. Whatever means necessary, I’m not dying here to these bastards.”

They both nodded and replied in unison. “Understood Overseer.”

As the troopers made a hole, Arden shoved his way through the panicked crewmen to get to the aft exit to the bridge. To get to the escape pods, they’d have to get down a deck, but with the debris and fires in the corridors, that was going to be a challenge. As smoke started to fill the corridor, Arden slipped on the filter mask he always kept on hand should the need to avoid particulate matter arise. With his delicate lungs, he could take no chances. A large chunk of bulkhead blocked the main ramp from the main deck to the escape deck below. With the other ramps clogged, Arden’s escorts did their best to move the item with little success. As Arden moved forward to survey the situation, he noticed one of the ship’s Willing crewmembers trapped beneath the piece of twisted metal.

“Overseer, please.” The man looked up at Arden with begging eyes. They both knew this man would die without assistance, but at the same time there was no telling how long the reactor would hold. The human did some mental calculations and then pulled out his lightsaber. While he was first considering the cuts he would need to make, another thought was crossing his mind. While he could take care to avoid harming the man, that would complicate the task. On the other hand, if this new Collective was as formidable as they thus far appeared, keeping the loyalty of the Willing was going to be important. This wasn’t just a command decision, it was a business decision and that made it easier for him. Was this man’s life a valuable enough asset to take a risk on. After a second or two, Arden flicked on the lightsaber. As the golden blade ignited, Arden lowered it and pointed it in the general direction of the crewman. The trapped man gave a gasp of horror. “Sir, no, what are you doing!?!”

With a series of quick but careful cuts, the first being around the downed man, Arden carved the chunk of debris into smaller pieces which his escorts managed to move out of the way. The now freed crewmember looked up at Arden with a grateful expression. Before he could say anything, Arden yanked him to his feet.

“That means I think you’re still an asset, don’t make me doubt my investment.”

The crewman nodded rapidly and jetted for the nearest escape pod. Arden and his escorts were not far behind. While the Willing crowded into the pods, security troops were making sure no slaves managed to take up vital spots in the escape craft. In Plagueis, every man had a place and, unlike in some cultures, it wasn’t the place of the captain to go down with the ship. It was that of the Faceless, those who namelessly served until death. And death was what was about to come for many of them. Their lives were irrelevant. They were expendable assets, not worth the investment to preserve. They would be marked off the balance sheet and replaced in time. Arden thought not of them as he crawled into a pod occupied by his escorts, a couple officers, and another pair of security troopers. Once aboard, he keyed the command to close the pod doors and initiate the launch sequence. The lives of those still on the frigate, the lives of the pilots that were being lost protecting the ship, none of that mattered to Arden right now. Only one thing did.

“They’re going to pay for this, literally.” Arden muttered to no one in particular. This was a full blown war now and there was an old saying from a Muun philosophical text Arden had come to appreciate.

War is good for business.