*The Power of the Force*

**Uncharted System**

**Sector Gamma-Delta-Delta-Seven**

**Unknown Regions**

Tython Squadron roared out of the asteroid field blazing laser fire in all directions, taking the hostile forces off-guard. Heavily engaged with the smaller, more nimble Nighthawk piloted vessels the mercenaries’ own fighter craft wilted away like blades of grass before a scythe. Savant Aaleeshah had established comms with the leader of the Arconan forces, Constantine and patched him through.

“Thank you for the timely arrival Tython. Seems like we both have a score to settle here. How should we play this out?” asked Constantine. Wynter deferred to his Tactical Officer, Mar Sul. “Sirs, if I may, with our arrival we are hammering down the enemy’s interceptor and support craft. It appears we took them unaware and we have a small window to wreck havoc before friendly forces arrive on station from across the system. Our main problem is that damn Nebulon-B that is directing all counter-fire.”

Wynter considered this information carefully as he lead his flight towards a group of old but efficient Z-95 Headhunters and Y-Wing bombers. “That must be the flagship of this flotilla. Someone of importance must be on her bridge. If we can infiltrate her we can find out who these bastards are working for. Constantine, if I put my fighters under your operational control can Nighthawk buy my strike team some time to insert and gather intelligence?” asked Wynter.

Constantine offered in the affirmative, as Savant Aaleeshah networked a joint comms between the friendly craft. In moments a command and control element was established and joint tactical displays were illuminating inside each fighter craft. “Good hunting ladies and gentlemen. Tyraal, Chrome, Zeline, Junazee, and Arcia on me. Prepare for hostile landing inside that Nebulon’s hanger bay. Mar Sul, assist Constantine in any way possible. Major Tanos has temporary command of Tython in case we do not make it out.”

In an instant the designated pilots formed up in tight formation and wheeled off from the melee. Nighthawk and Tython vessels dispersed widely, tasking the laser batteries on the Nebulon-B and straining the vessels targeting systems. Wynter and his team now came in for the kill, flying as close together as they dared to present the smallest sight picture to the enemy. “Hang on ladies and gentlemen, crashing through that energy field is going to take a drastic toll on our shields.” Chrome offered gruffly.

The lead craft, piloted by Tyraal Bitshiver made contact with the energy field first. Sparks illuminated his craft as it skittered lifelessly to the deck inside the Nebulon B’s hanger bay. The temporary delay in the status field allowed the other craft to fly in and drop their propulsion instantly, inertia smashing the craft to the deck and taking out equipment and ground crew wildly. As the pilots stumbled out of their cockpits, enemy fire was sporadic and disjointed. The mercenaries had not prepared for such a rouse. “Constantine, we are in. If we are not out in fifteen minutes or if you can’t disable this big bitch be prepared to launch without us.” Wynter declared. For the strike team, it was truly do or die.

**Hanger Bay**

**Defiant II**

**Unknown System**

**Unknown Region**

Within minutes the fighting for the hanger bay was over. The small security team, aided by mechanics and reserve pilots were easily dispatched by the ferocious Jedi and officers of the strike team. The Jedi, however, exchanged uneasy looks. “What? Something is wrong. Why aren’t they rushing security forces to cut us off?” asked Wynter.

The female Miraluka turned to face her commanding officer as Zeline and Tyraal looked at each other wearily. “Commander, they wanted us to land. This ship has a skeleton crew as it is, but they are not pushing forces to stop us. They have pulled forces to the bridge but have left the access points unguarded. There is a Sith aboard. I feel her presence.”

Wynter swore loudly to Junazee. “Well, if we are forced to deal with a bad hand lets at least see if we can’t make fine ale out of rotten fruit. Arcia, Chrome, the way to the engineering bay is wide open. Take down the ships propulsion system and hold it down. Jedi, on me. Looks like we need to take the bridge.”

Tython Squadron’s commander did not like splitting up his scant forces, but presented with the opportunity of disabling the craft he had no choice. Mentally, he took stock of the reprimand Mar Sul and Major Tanos might give him for doing so. “This goes against every rule of military tactics, but under the circumstances I cannot disagree.” Offered Colonel Cortel as she lead Chrome towards the engineering bay. Luckily, the odd design of the Nebulon-B presented them a short hike to the propulsion systems in the rear of the craft. With any luck, they would have dispatched the guards and have control of the ships engineering plant within minutes.

“Be efficient but not too good Chrome, we don’t want the bridge to know the ship is compromised, yet.” Wynter gave the order hesitantly as the Junazee and the Knights prepared to move forward. “Good hunting Tython.”

The Jedi and Wynter methodically moved down the axial ray that divided the fore and aft of the Nebulon-B. It was a kill zone, and they all knew it. The fact that the enemy had not erected strongpoints, emplaced laser batteries, or closed blast doors let them know they were indeed walking into a trap. It was both a blessing and a curse that the economical and efficient design of the Nebulon-B gave them a clear path to the bridge. They neared the bridge and Wynter gave the order to hold fast. “Juna, you said this vessel had a skeleton crew but their laser fire against our craft was blistering. How is that possible?” asked Wynter.

“Droids sir, the sentient crew are spread out along the laser batteries. I sense only a handful of sentients on the bridge itself.” Answered Zeline before Junazee could respond.

Wynter ordered them forward, as the Jedi ignited their sabers and cautiously approached the bridge. As they walked into the cramped but multi-level command pod Wynter cursed his team’s luck. Droids indeed. A squad of Magna-Guards stood erect, surrounding a single crimson robbed human Twi’Lek female. Her blood red hue and snarling face let out a dangerous laugh. “Greetings Jedi, welcome to my ship.” The Magna-Guards pounced, making contact with the Knights and Junazee. “I am glad you made it Grand Inquisitor Wynter. I have been expecting you for a long time.”

**Bridge**

 **Defiant II**

**Unknown System**

**Unknown Region**

Knights Zeline and Tyraal engaged two Magna-Guards each as Seer Junazee entered battle meditation, directing the efforts of the athletic and young Jedi, giving them strength and radiating Force energy. Wynter slowly approached the Sith combatant. “Taril Hron. It has been a long time since we crossed paths.” The Twi’Lek smiled, not yet igniting her deadly blade.

“Indeed. If I recall, you left me to die on Belsavis. I thought that our time together meant more to you than that. You must know the Inquisitorius does not take lightly to its top agents defecting to the enemy.”

Wynter made no move to his blasters. He sensed the rage and scorn within the Twi’Lek. “It was nothing personal Taril. I admit you were a hard habit to break. Did you know? Were you aware of what would happen to New Tython? And yet you stayed on?” asked Wynter.

That blood curdling laugh echoed against the singing dance that was lightsaber on Force pike raging in the background. “Not that it matters, but I did not. Still, many of us remained *loyal*. Did you know that I was assigned to guard you? Assigned to turn you? Why have you blocked out the Force for so long? You could have been one of our best assets in the Inquisitorious but your weaknesses and fear have blinded you.”

Wynter walked slowly towards the Twi’Lek, and offered an embrace. They hugged for a moment before she pushed him away forcefully. “I will admit seducing you was easy enough. But your betrayal cut me deeply. If it was up to me I would stab your heart out and deliver your head to Arx. Alas, that is not my mission.” She declared.

“And what is your mission?” asked Wynter politely. She laughed yet again. “No, not so fast or so easy my old friend. Tell your men to stand down and come with me.” Junazee warned him telepathically, alerting him that Arcia and Chrome had made contact with a team of Magna-Guards and were fighting for control of engineering.

“Even if I did, they wouldn’t listen to me. You aren’t leaving this ship alive Taril.” Stated Wynter bluntly, with a sigh of sadness.

Her gaze pierced him, this time she did not laugh. “These Jedi trust you and have faith in you. Order them to stand down or you will watch them die in front of you. Give in to the power of the Dark side and come home with me. I will let them live and join the Inquisitorious.”

Before he could answer, Junazee stepped forward and ignited her lightsaber. “Commander, get what we came here for. I am not afraid of this evil bitch.” Wynter reluctantly ran towards the data console and began to slice into the databank. He heard the hiss of blade on blade.

The Magna-Guards were efficient Jedi killing machines, but they were ancient and not well maintained. In the distance Wynter saw that Zeline and Tyraal were finishing off the last pair. “Clear the bridge, help Cortel and Chrome. If we do not make it scuttle this ship and launch.” The two Knights hesitated, not wanting to leave their Miraluka and human comrades. Reluctantly, they ran off dutifully.

Wynter sliced as fast as he could, gathering any data that was readily available. He looked back, and saw Junazee fighting with a grace and tranquility he had never before witnessed. The Sith Twi’Lek attacked aggressively and filled with hate. She was gaining ground slowly, pushing Junazee away from the egress points and towards a bulkhead. He had no time to think.

Rushing forward, he ran to Junazee’s aid. He doubted she needed it, truthfully, but his sense of duty overtook him. Taril was slashing ferociously, her superior strength evident. Finally, Wynter let his own rage, and bitterness over New Tython overcome him. “Enough!” he screamed, as Taril was pushed backwards. Junazee did not miss the opportunity, and plunged her blade deep into the Twi’Lek’s midsection. She fell, sliding a few meters across the deck.

“Commander…” she was at a loss. Taril laughed, coughing up dark clumps of blood. “Then my work here is done. She dropped her saber and tried to regain her feet. Wynter ran to her. “Junazee, take the helm! Report to Constantine and our forces to land. We need extra hands to clear out the gunnery crews.” The Seer did not want to leave her commander alone with the dying Sith. She reluctantly took a seat at the helm and made contact. Wynter took hold of the Sith and carried her dying body to the medical bay.

**Medical Bay**

**Defiant II**

**Unknown System**

**Unknown Region**

In an hour it was all over. Taril Hron was dead, and the remaining sentient crew were in custody. They had given up with little bloodshed. The intelligence gained from the *Defiant II* was little, sadly. Wynter could now confirm that the Inquisitorious was funding the corruption of junior officers within the OEF and that the Shipwright’s Guild was funneling resources to this mercenary force. How deep the corruption ran, they did not know. Something big was in the works however.

Constantine and the members of Nighthawk had established communication with Arcona high command, and capital ships would be inbound to clean up the system shortly. Savant Aaleeshah was establishing a coded connection back to Daleem.

Wynter approached Constantine and held out his hand. “Congratulations sir, your men put on a fine show. Your command of a joint force was brilliant. My compliments to Arcona.”

Constantine shook Wynter’s hand swiftly and came in for a forceful hug. “Indeed sir. Your pilots are some of the best I have ever seen. Your Jedi were spectacular in clearing this vessel. What now?”

Wynter paused, thinking for a moment. “Arcona has had its revenge for the assault on your home system. We leave this system to your care. We learned enough here to know there will be significant problems back home for us. This mission was never sanctioned and here we have commandeered an enemy warship. The repercussions will be dire..” he was stopped by a brash look from Constantine.

“Well then, comrade, it is best no one knows about it then?” The two locked eyes and smiled. “Indeed, we will be leaving immediately. Several of our Tie Defenders are badly damaged. We will need to take this ship as a war prize and hide it somewhere for safe keeping.”

Wynter turned to see Aaleeshah, who was flanked by Chrome, Mar Sul, Korroth, and Major Tanos. “And I need to make a call to Maximus and Len immediately. They will need to make a call on the Shipwright’s Guild sooner than later. As for Tython Squadron…I think we may be grounded for a time…”

He turned to leave, and slowly made his way to the bridge. He stopped to look at Taril’s lifeless body. He was deeply saddened. Junazee still sat at the helm, and began to pilot the craft home. Ethan Martes soon relieved her of her duties.

“Commander…what happened back there…how did you?” she asked without saying. “I don’t want to talk about it. *Ever*.” He sank down in a chair and pondered the implications.