

# Shi's Vault

An excellent adventure

Arvalis Raith #7722

The sound of leather gloves creaking was barely audible over the howling winds racing through the airlock. Arvalis' hands were balled into fists, his mind replaying the mission parameters over and over and over again.

*Minimum casualties.* Justinios Drake, Quaestor of House Ektrosis had said.

"Easy for him to say, he's not the one about to be shot at. Repeatedly. Ugh, fine. Whatever." the Umbaran whispered to himself as he went over the mission brief once more. His concentration broken as the comlink in his helmet was overloaded by Major Celia Aurum, his trusted companion, pilot and if need be; medic.

"Oi, *Paleface*, she can't maintain stealth much longer. If you're gonna do something, please do it now."

Arvalis took a deep breath, composing himself, sharpening his focus and mind to a knife's edge. He counted down in his mind...and jumped.

The building, supposedly a research facility owned by the late Kagu Shi, closed in rapidly. Spreading his arms and legs in a five-pointed star shape did little to slow his momentum, but he held onto the pose anyway. The HUD in his helmet racing down the proximity teller, he straightened out feet first and gave a short burst of his Mitrinomon thrusters, slowing his decent but not completely stopping.

"Hey Arvalis, you forgot your lightsaber." Celia hailed in.

"Not! Now! Major!"

"Ooooooh, I thought you'd have either landed by now or at least painted part of the building red." Then a deep, pondering *mhmmm* followed. "Umbarans do have red blood, yeah?"

Another kick of the small boot-mounted thrusters came in as Arvalis became suspended mid-air. Just two meters above a massive glass viewport. He assumed the window was strong enough to hold him. If not, he'd find out soon enough.

"So, about that lightsaber, *Paleface*?"

"Rian said no evidence of Force wielders. A big glowing stick kinda works against that."

"Yeah, I guess it would. Do you want me to dispatch the ID10 by the way?"

"You didn't already?"

"Just kidding, it should be arriving..."

The small jetblack droid hovered onto Arvalis' shoulder.

"It's here, Major."

"...Now!" She sighed. "OH COME ON! I wanted it to be dramatic. Anyway, I'm outta here, stealth won't hold out much longer." And with that, the *Nightjar* dropped its stealth and blasted off towards the upper atmosphere.

The glass window didn't hold him as the Umbaran crashed through the panel. Instinct drove him to stretch and spread out his left leg and right arm, while his left hand softly touched the floor as he landed. The pose drew a cheerful chirp from the ID10 droid as it started to clank two of its appendages together. When Arvalis realized the silly pose he was standing in, he stood up fully and brushed his robes off while clearing his throat.

“You’d better have not been recording that!” He said menacingly to the droid. He did hope it wasn’t. He wouldn’t hear the end of it if footage of his superhero landing did the rounds upon his return.

Choosing not to dwell on the rather embarrassing position he was in moments ago, Arvalis took a quick scan of the room he found himself in. Sparsely furnished, but heavily decorated, the room most likely served as a board room. Luckily it was empty at this time. Most of the building should have been, save for the security guard stationed here and there. But something told him that trouble was brewing on the horizon.

Doing his best to keep noise to a minimum, Arvalis slowly opened the glass door. The only audible sound in the hallway being the minor humming of the ID10s repulsor, lifting it several feet from the ground. Its red photoreceptor turning violently in all directions, scanning the immediate vicinity. Arvalis had little trouble navigating through the dimly lit labyrinthian structure, the internal HUD of his helmet providing him with a layout of the building, while his genetics gave him superior sight in dark conditions.

Rounding a corner, he spotted a lone security guard.

*Limited casualties. Limited casualties.* He reminded himself several times.

Raising and flicking two of fingers at the target, the ID10 droid shot into motion as it rapidly ascended to the ceiling of the corridor before zooming towards the guard. Extending its shock probe, a bright blue spark fired up and into the poor sod on its business end. The droid proceeded to use two of its pincers to drag the guard into an adjacent room.

“Limited casualties.” Arvalis sighed to himself. He usually preferred a more...permanent...form of incapacitation. The dead don’t talk, and they certainly don’t come back to take revenge. Still, he understood the decision made by the Aleena. After *that* fiasco which resulted in the death of a highly valuable asset, the SRI couldn’t afford another failure and lose more potential researchers.

Arvalis would not fail.

The turbolift ride was uneventful, as lift rides usually turned out to be. The ticker scrolled down rapidly as it darted passed floor after floor. Arvalis took the brief respite to gather himself and attune his senses to the Force. But his quiet introspection was rudely interrupted when his Force sense went haywire, starting as the slightest tingle at the back of his throat, before gradually growing to a pounding sensation at the base of his skull. The facilities’ alarms soon followed as they started blaring throughout the building.

When Arvalis turned his head to look down at the droid, it had been standing on its claws throughout the elevator ride, he was met by the droid lifting two of its appendages in an all too human shrug.

Had they found the guard? Or was something else going on? Something that *would* be a cause for concern?

He shook his head as if to clear it of unwelcome thoughts. But he could not shake the feeling that the mission was about to change in the most drastic of ways.

The lift suddenly coming to a screeching halt on the ground floor was a slight confirmation of that feeling. The sight that greeted him after the doors opened was full confirmation and Arvalis could not resist but sink his face into one of his hands, and letting out a deep sigh after cursing under his breath.

Red streaks traced burning lines as they screeched through, what Arvalis assumed, was the main lobby. Those same bolts were however intercepted, swatted aside, and ultimately

made to fizzle out against the duracrete surroundings by a solitary figure weaving a net of purple plasma with his lightsaber. The sequences seemed rather sloppy and unrefined, and Arvalis had a good guess why. One of Taldryan's inner circle, one of its finest Jedi, if not for the fact that he was also the Clan's resident boozehound, had somehow found his way to the *Dark Sector*. Not only that, Raistline Taldrya had somehow inserted himself straight into Arvalis' mission. It regretfully wasn't the first time, and Arvalis dreadfully had a sinking feeling in his gut that it also would not be the last time, it would happen.

The Umbaran knew the Augur didn't need saving, but he could not just do nothing when a Scion of Taldrya was in need of assistance. Drawing his twin WESTAR-35s, he flicked them to their stun setting and proceeded to unleash volleys of electric blue rings into the crowd in front of him. One by one, most of the unaware guards dropped to the floor with violent twitching spasms. Others were taken care of by small, jetblack droid. The truly unlucky ones met their end as they fell to Raistline's amethyst colored blade.

Already having holstered his blasters and with his arms outstretched, Arvalis sunk into the currents of the Force. His mind's eye forming a clear picture of Raistline's silhouette that he proceeded to grasp with invisible hands, Arvalis tugged hard through the Force sending the Augur flying into the lift. Visible confusion set in on the inebriated Jedi's face before it was replaced with the look of recognition as Arvalis removed his helmet and helped his old friend to his feet before pressing the B1 button.

"Oh, Arvalis." An undertone of relief filled Raistline's voice. "Wassup."

"Raistline," Arvalis replied while adding a concise nod.

The cogs of Raistline's mind visibly started to turn as he opened his mouth before closing it again and placing his index finger over his lips.

Arvalis let the moment pass by, allowing the drunk Jedi to gather his thoughts. He was polite like that.

"If you're here..." Raistline trailed off. "Wait. *Why* are you here?"

Before Arvalis could reply, Raistline waved his hand and continued.

"Did I stumble into a mission by accident, again?"

Arvalis simply nodded and put his helmet back on before adding "*again*," in a less than friendly tone

The turbolift let out a high-pitched "ding", notifying its passengers they had arrived. Disembarking, Arvalis settled into a brisk pace towards the guard room, abruptly stopping when he didn't hear Raistline following suit. He turned to face the Augur who was rubbing his eyes as he gawked around. The Umbaran contemplated leaving him behind, if only for a moment. But Raistline would probably cause more problems for his mission than anything else in the facility when left to his own devices.

*How do I always seem to end up on babysitting duty.* He thought to himself.

"I need the next set of guards alive." Arvalis said to no one in particular, right before he kicked in the door leading to the guard chamber.

Chaos erupted as bolts *whooshed* past his face. His heightened senses allowed the Umbaran to bob and weave between the streaks of blood red plasma with relative ease. As he was about to return their fire with stun blasts of his own, Raistline's purple blade traced lines through the air as the Augur burst into the room and made quick work of the guards.

Much to Arvalis' ire.

"Raist! He yelled, his voice booming through the small room. "I needed them alive!"

"Huh? Oh, right." The Raistline responded dryly.

“Ugh, fine. Whatever.” Arvalis sighed.

“Why did you need them anyway?”

“The item we need to access our objective is kept in a security locker behind that blastdoor...”

“We can cut through both of those!” Raistline interjected.

“Behind that blastdoor are miniature vaults protected by ray shields”

“Oooh...yeah. Yeah, that’s bad.”

Arvalis groaned before looking around the room. When his eyes caught a grid providing access to a ventilation shaft, he gripped it with the Force and brought it clanging down on the floor.

The ID10 droid only needed a nod from Arvalis before it floated into the shaft. It was a tight fit, even for the small statured droid.

“See if you can find the power lines. Cut them.”

Beeping from within the shaft notified Arvalis that his orders would be carried out.

Satisfied, the Umbaran drew his lightsaber. Its dark grey blade screamed to life as the pillar of power split the air and settled into a melodic hum. Moments later, a sizeable hole had been cut into the blastdoor which was overlooked by the guard post.

Just as Arvalis entered the vault, the ray shields dropped and the ID10 seeker droid crashed out of the ventilation shaft, jolts of electricity trailing over its outer shell and disgruntled beeps erupting from deep within.

Ignoring the droid, Arvalis picked up the datapad and keycard he came for, inspected both, and gave a satisfied nod as the droid climbed onto his back while letting out low beeps.

“Sorry buddy. Take a rest, you did good.” the Umbaran said.

“Raist!” Still angry at the Jedi for killing the guards. “Time for phase 2!”

“We’re not done? Wasn’t that what you came here for?”

Arvalis let out a laugh, his helmet morphing the sound slightly.

“We’re just getting started. Come on.”

The top floor was the personal loft of one of Kagu Shi’s top lieutenants. Much like the *former* scientist, his lieutenant took his security very seriously. It had forced Arvalis to take a trip down to retrieve a keycard which in turn allowed him to travel all the way back up to the very top of the facility.

The elevator opened up into what Arvalis assumed was the only public area of the floor - a lone durasteel desk accompanied by three chairs, one on the far end and two at lift-side, were placed in the center of the room.

An elderly Umbaran woman sat at the table, her silver hair gleaming under the artificial lighting. A decrepit smile rose on her face as she pushed a button under the desk. Two alcoves in the wall behind her opened up and four IG-100 Magnaguard droids streamed out. Their plating chipped and perforated, these droids hadn’t seen action in years.

Raistline jumped out of the elevator with blinding speed, lightsaber in hand, its pillar of power splitting the air. Arvalis gathered his own lightsaber, hidden inside his robes. Its blade screeching to life to follow suit.

The droids spun their electrostaves before launching lumbering strikes. Raistline parried one of the droids, the impact causing its arm to snap off at the elbow joint. In one smooth motion the Augur brought his purple blade up and down in a crescent moon slash. The droid fell to the floor in a smoking pile of melted metal. Jumping back to dodge the second droid,

Raistline seized the separated head from the first droid with the Force and sent it flying into the second.

Spinning its wrist joint, the droid intercepted the makeshift projectile with its own weapon. It was enough of an opening for Raistline to sink his blade into the droid's heart.

Arvalis ducked under a horizontal swipe, then quickly launched into a sideways roll to avoid the vertical smash of the second droid behind him. Extending his arm in a wide sweep while mid-roll, he was surprised the droids parried the strike. Rising back to his feet, he wondered why Raistline was the lucky one and he was stuck fighting the better maintained droids.

Two panels in the ceiling above opened and two turret emplacements swiveled down. They immediately took aim at the Jedi pair and loosened a couple of bolts their way.

Raistline deftly wove a defensive net of purple plasma around him. Arvalis had more trouble, between the droids breathing down his neck and his own perspective on lightsaber combat. The Umbaran was giving up ground, his feet dancing left and right as red beams of death and the crackle of electricity nipped at his body.

When one of the droids suddenly was sent flying through the nearest window, Arvalis feeling the residue of Raistline's Force signature, he seized the opportunity and went in to dispatch of the second droid. He didn't like fighting droids. They were emotionless husks, dead in the Force save for the energy powering their circuits. He could feel it inside of himself, that otherwise raging fire of the Force reduced to mere embers.

But even embers had their use.

On the edge of his senses, he felt the charge up of the turret's energy coils. He visualized his hands wrapping around the weapon and twisting it at the droid. Parrying a staff strike, he freed his left hand and reached out through the Force, giving the turret a slight nudge with invisible hands and let the emplacement do the rest.

Her droids dispatched of, elderly looking female motioned for the two Taldryanites to have a seat through a rather emphatic gesture. Once both Arvalis and Raistline sat down opposite of her, a decrepit smile rose on her face as the turrets powered down and retracted into the ceiling once more.

"My apologies master Jedi," the elder woman spoke. "Just a security measure. I hope you understand, after just laying waste to see many of my men."

The words caused Arvalis to turn his head towards Raist. Underneath his helmet, a sickening scowl rose on his otherwise smiling lips. Anger bubbled up within his core. But he was just barely able to contain it. Stashing it away in the internal furnace he had built as part of his own Jedi training, it would stoke the fires of the Dark Side in the battles of the future.

"If you will allow me to remove my helmet, miss..."

"Ortega, Helranth Ortega. Of course you may."

Having done so, Arvalis ran his hand through his hair, flicking his longer bangs to one side as he carefully eyed Helranth. He saw a look of recognition in her eyes. And there it was.

"You remind me of my grandson, young one."

"We have no intention of killing you, miss." Arvalis gave a reassuring smile as he pulled out one of his blasters, set it to stun and made Raistline go limp.

The action took the woman by surprise.

"I am here under the authority of Justinios Drake. We wish to offer our condolences for the death of Kagu Shi."

The name drop caused the woman to chuckle.

“Don’t be sorry for it child,” she said. “Shi was a fool who would have met his end by my hand soon enough. I am in control of the majority of the operations now. So I have to thank you, Jedi of Taldryan.”

Arvalis kept that trademark smile of his on his lips. Despite the rather shocking revelation.

“So, *master Jedi*, what can this old hag do for you.” Helranth’s voice turned softer as the tips of her fingers played a rhapsody of tips-and-taps on the desk.

“It is what *we* can do for you, miss Ortega. You said so yourself, you control to majority but not all of it. We can help you secure your hold on this fractured...*enterprise*.”

“Interesting, and what would be apt payment for such luxurious services?”

Arvalis slid the datapad he had retrieved in the basement over to the scientist. “Come work for us.”

Picking up the datapad, Helranth scrolled through the various names of projects she, along with others had worked on. The cogs in her mind started turning as her eye fell on a particular one. But she wouldn’t just give in.

“Trade in one set of chains for another? Preposterous.” She scoffed.

Arvalis waved his hand, dismissing the comment. “There are no chains in Taldryan for you to wear. No whip to snap at your flesh. No shock collars to keep you in line. You are free to go and do as you please.”

“As long as I produce what you want?”

“No, as long as you produce what *you* want. In timely fashion of course.”

She seemed to entertain the offer. It didn’t have to be said that Taldryan was not a big fish in a small pond as her current operation was. They had eyes and ears across the galaxy, a reach far beyond the Caelus-system. If she could use their resources...

“Very well, young Umbaran. Where do I sign.”

Arvalis’ smile widened, but it would’ve taken a droid to measure the difference.