

# Of Friend and Foe

## [TAL + CSP] A Collective Danger

Mune Cinteroph-Palpatine (3607)

The images dissipated from the Shistavanen's mind, his eyes opening to the dimly lit familiarity of his office. As he normally experienced after sending his mind forward in time, he found himself numbed to the present. He took a deep breath, and then another to ground himself. Ruby eyes focused back on the reality surrounding him. The cool floor under his buttocks, the soft whisper of the ventilation. His gaze swept over the mess of datapads, encircling him where he sat crosslegged.

*What are you looking for?*

He exhaled slowly. It had been some time, and still he fought to understand the images and symbols that had flooded his mind. Farsight was by no means an exact art he knew, he only wished he could make better use of what he saw. Was it he who was lacking? He seldomly wondered these days upon that question.

With a heavy sigh he brushed his hair from his face, ears laid back in agitation. He glanced to the timepiece on his desk and noted the passing of nearly fourteen hours. Platinum blonde hair fell in tousled disarray over his eyes, the fur on his ears ungroomed. Without fervor, he glanced over each pad as he picked it up to stack it upon the next. Report upon report, some much older than others, some as recent as to be from only this morning. He eyed one of the many entries before tossing it onto the growing stack. With a growl he rose to his feet and stretched, joints popping and aching from disuse.

The Force whispered in his thoughts, the spectral touch of phantom fingertips softly stroking his conscious mind before slipping away again into the aether. Mune paused. He tried to grasp at the fleeting images, but once more they were gone. He cursed under his breath, and snatched up the nearest datapad in annoyance. He stopped short of tossing it upon his growing pile. His eyes took in the data, an analytic mind hard at work to make out just what it was he was looking at while his thoughts still lingered.

Puzzle pieces began to snap into place. He studied the movements displayed to him on the screen and thumbed through the text slowly. "Taldryan," he whispered. He revisited the Collective's movements. He questioned which scouts had made the reports in his hands, though he felt well enough about them that he needed no further information or even confirmation. More than a handful of the images he had been shown by the Force pointed towards what was soon to occur. The Collective were readying an attack upon Clan Taldryan. Mune's ears laid back against his head as he eyed the charts. There was not enough data to draw such a conclusion, but he did not need it. He knew. If Taldryan was to come under attack, they'd take serious damage while they were still recovering from Pravus' recent attack.

"Somehow, our futures are intertwined," Mune spoke to the emptiness of his office. He extended a hand and used the Force to retrieve his comlink and activated the device.

"I need a ship prepared. Immediately."

"Right away, sir," came the response.

"I'll need pilots... make it a Lambda-class. I'll arrive in a couple hours," Mune instructed.

"Yes, sir."

Mune slipped from his office into his personal living quarters off the back of the business space with his mind set on a change of clothing. He keyed his comlink once more as he pulled on a clean shirt. He heard a crash through the comlink, and waited a moment to hear that there was certainly someone on the other end before he spoke.

"Kylex, you and your apprentice are to meet me in two hours at the port."

"Oh? What is..." another crash and a jingling tinkle of what sounded like glass.

*That better not have been a window,* Mune thought as he pulled the straps of his arm holsters taut before tucking his lightsabers into them.

"What is going on?" Kylex finally finished.

"I will fill you in once we are underway."

"Should I report to Derek?"

"No. I will contact the Empress once we are enroute."

"Gotcha mate," and the signal was cut.

It was not long before Mune was leaving Emperor Adoniram Tower behind. He chose to walk to the port where the shuttle would be going through final preparations. Mune pulled his hood over his ears to protect from the cool evening air. It was still strange being back on his homeworld with the clan in tow. Caelestis City bustled around him, night life at its peak. The takeover by Scholae Palatinae did little to dissuade the civilians from going about their usual, and actually encouraged them. Life went on, *as it always does*, Mune thought.

He entered the security checkpoint and was shown to the waiting shuttle. Shortly after, he was joined by Kylex and Kadrol. The unkempt, white haired Human male met his eye from across the platform. Sanguris raised his cybernetic arm to wave in Mune's direction. The half Pantoran at his side, his apprentice, looked uncertain what to make of the bestial man awaiting their arrival.

"Thank you both for coming," Mune greeted when they were in earshot without raising his voice.

Mune turned his ruby eyes on the young Pantoran. "Kadrol Hauen."

The boy eyed the Grey Jedi for a moment before speaking, "Am I supposed to know your name?"

Kylex cuffed his apprentice on the back of his head. Mune simply grinned, eyes alight with amusement. "Show some respect for the Grand Admiral."

Kadrol's eyes widened slightly. Mune's grin only grew. "I pay it no mind. My name is Mune Cinteroph. Introduction out of the way, we must be away."

The pilots of the shuttle had them away in short order, leaving the orbit of Ragnath and maneuvering to leave the Caperion System. Mune returned to his companions after a short discussion with the pilots. "Our destination is the Caelus System."

"What is there of interest to us there?"

"The *Paragon*, and Clan Taldryan," Mune said, as though that answered the question.

Kylex straightened up from where he was lounged. "Clan Taldryan?"

"You need to trust me," Mune stated flatly. He moved past the two and towards the rear of the cabin. He used the communications terminal to connect directly with the personal quarters of their Empress, Elincia Rei.

"Yes...?"

Mune could tell he had just woken her from slumber. "Elincia."

"Mune? What is it? It is well past midnight." The edge of concern in her voice was clear to him - no matter if she tried to hide it or not, he would recognize it.

"I had to take leave. It is a matter of critical importance."

"It could not wait until morning? We should be allowed time to discuss and plan accordingly if it is so important." Elincia was fully awake now and her voice had become mildly agitated.

"I cannot explain. At least... not in any satisfactory way." Mune finally felt exhaustion creeping up on him.

"Where are you going? I can have additional manpower sent to meet with you."

"Unnecessary. I have taken both Kylex and his apprentice along. They are all the help I will need. Trust in me as I trust in you, my friend." Mune cut the signal and let himself drop into one of the seats. Sleep opened its gaping jaws to consume him. He let it.

It may have felt as though he had only closed his eyes for a moment, but eight hours had passed. They had already come and gone from hyperspace a hand full of times. The pilots were adjusting their course for the next jump.

Kylex was shuffling a deck of cards, distracting himself while Kadrol napped in the seat across from him. "May I ask, what this trip is about?"

Mune sat up and stretched.

"Few are aware. One of the powers I employ and have been gifted in since I was very young is the power of Farsight. The Force allows me to see ahead, though not necessarily understand. Understanding has taken years of hard study."

"What I am getting is... you saw something in a dream," Kylex noted flatly.

"I suppose you could look at it that way," Mune chuckled.

"So, sir, if you do not mind explaining what it is we are doing?" Kylex pressed.

"Are you questioning your superior?"

"I may be insane but I do like to know what insanity I am getting into. Especially if it is not my own insanity."

Kadrol stirred.

Mune let with another soft sigh and closed his eyes. "The Collective is to attack Clan Taldryan. It is, however... a sleight of hand, from what I am thinking." The Shistavanen opened his eyes to catch Kylex' intense gaze. "The impressions I get..."

"The Collective are targeting their leadership, not the Clan," Kylex cut in. "Assassins."

"Precisely," Mune nodded. "Though, keep in mind, I could be completely mistaken altogether."

Kadrol snorted, awake and listening.

"Grand Admiral, we are approaching the Caelus Belt." Mune's ears perked at the pilot's voice over the intercom.

"Little chance they have not detected us. Remember. Do not raise a weapon against the Taldryan." Mune warned. Kylex and Kadrol both glanced at each other before looking back at Mune curiously. "We are not here to create conflict."

"What are we here for then?" Kadrol asked, unable to mask the irritation in his voice.

"I don't know. I cannot explain it."

They fell silent. The Caelus Belt fell behind them as they continued their approach. The only sounds were those of the ship around them. They all kept their own council. Fifteen minutes passed and Mune rose to move to the front of the ship to join the pilots, before they were contacted by an approaching squadron. Mune watched the X-Wings on the monitors.

"Identify yourselves," came the order Mune was waiting for.

"I am Mune Cinteroph-Palpatine, Grand Admiral of Scholae Palatinae." Mune paused to let that sink in for a moment. "I've come to request a meeting with Regent Rian Taldrya."

"Hold course and stand by," the squadron commander responded.

Five minutes of silence passed. Mune watched a second squadron draw near. It appeared as though they were not taking any chances. *Stay calm*, Mune thought to himself. The pilots looked uncertain while they came to be surrounded. "They will not attack, they will not risk a war with another Clan. Not now, not so soon after Pravus' destruction of their home system." He thought on the loss of Cocytus, his ears twitched, betraying his own nervousness.

Five minutes more, and a new voice came onto the line. "This is Vice-Regent Halcyon Taldrya. Why is it you knowingly invade our space, Grand Admiral of Scholae Palatinae?"

"It is a matter of importance, else I'd have not come myself. I ask you please, grant us your audience."

Silence.

Ten minutes passed before they received their reply. "You will be escorted. You will surrender your weapons when you disembark your shuttle."

The channel was closed and Mune nodded to the pilots to proceed. He rejoined the two in the rear of the ship and explained.

"You are kidding! Surrender our weapons?! How are we supposed to defend ourselves?!" Kadrol whined.

Mune shot him a firm look, reminding him to hold his tongue. Within little time, they arrived at the *Paragon* and were shown through the great ship to an audience chamber. Their weapons were left behind. His eyes searched the uniformed men and woman, trying to identify that something he couldn't quite put his finger on. The images given him by the Force were a jumble within his memory.

"Grand Admiral Cinteroph," Rian Taldrya sat comfortably at the head of the conference table, fingers laced together. "I am told you had a matter of some urgency to discuss with me?"

"It is my belief that Clan Taldryan is soon to be set upon by The Collective. I believe that you and your fellow leaders are to be assassinated." Mune said quite to be the point.

"How is it you come to presume such things?" This time, the green haired human; Halcyon, spoke.

"The Force. I've been been gifted and even trained in seeing events yet to transpire."

"Farsight? You put faith in this power?" Halcyon cracked a bit of a grin.

Mune felt the child before the man. "Not only that. I'd not have come here unless I felt strongly that things were about to transpire that could impact both our Clans in a negative way."

Halcyon fixed the younger man with an intense gaze from those green eyes. He sensed the younger man told the truth and shared a glance with the Regent. "As you are aware, that power is not necessarily the most accurate. Why is it you seem so sure of yourself and what you've seen?"

"I... just am."

"My men will escort you back to your ship. We'll remain alert," Rian assured.

With that, The three Palatinaeans were escorted from the audience chamber. Had he gotten through to them, Mune wondered. As they set foot upon their ship, the Force sounded a warning through Mune's mind. Kylex and Kadrol tensed a second after their Grand Admiral. Their two escorts were ran through immediately, the swords of their assailants ripping through armour in a single stroke. Mune and his companions were without armaments, but they had the Force.

*"Do not hesitate,"* Mune warned telepathically.

Kadrol shifted his weight,his armorweave cloak grazed by a hostile sword. He grasped his attacker loosely and jerked him off balance, using the man's momentum to connect a knee to the man's nose.

Kylex shifted his position, his attacker's blade catching him in the right arm and scraping along the cybernetic limb with a screech. The human was upon the assassin, using his full strength amplified by the Force to slam the man against a wall by the throat before crushing his windpipe.

Their escort crumpled to the floor, slain, freeing up their killers to make their move upon the Grand Admiral. The sound of blaster fire rang in his ears and he found his two assailants fall dead at his feet. Quejo lowered his DX-2s. "Gentlemen... The Regent and Vice-Regent were attacked upon your leave. They request a word with you. Seems your coming here forced the Collective to act."

Mune grinned sheepishly, "I would appreciate a word."