

# A Collective Danger

Arvalis Raith - Taldryan - #7722

Beads of sweat rolled down from his brow, down to his jaw, before dripping on the durasteel floor from his chin. Breaths came hard and fast as he dove forward through the ever-decreasing hole of the closing blast door. He could feel the energy of blaster bolts whizzing past him as they slammed and dissipated against the metal surfaces around him.

He hadn't had the time to analyze exactly what he had pulled out of the system as he was doing so. But whatever he had sliced out of that terminal, they were willing to kill him for it. It was amusing to him. Ever since he had returned to Taldryan, all kinds of people wanted to either separate his head from his shoulders, or riddle him with holes. Perhaps he was getting a reputation. Perhaps he was just unlucky to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"What could be so important," Arvalis mused to himself. "I've never been shot at as much in my life as I have been the past three months."

He checked in his comlink again. . . still nothing more than static bursts resounded in his ear. It was unusual to have this particular frequency jammed. But he had experienced it once before, many moons ago during the last war against the Collective. They had either pawned off the tech to other factions, or the Brotherhood hadn't exterminated them thoroughly enough. The mere thought that *they* were still out there twisted a knot in his stomach.

He tried to wipe the thought from his mind. He'd need to sharpen his focus if he wanted to get out of this facility alive; especially with the payload he was carrying. Rounding the next corner, he spotted a small guard detail up ahead.

He took a deep breath and felt the embers of the Force flicker deep within his being. He stoked the embers with his anger at being shot at, repeatedly; and the fear that they might actually stop missing soon. He felt the fires overtake him as the energies of the Force flowed into, and through him. His breathing slowed, and so did his perception of the world.

The guards turned towards him in slow motion. Fear beset their eyes as they saw the Umbaran reach for his blasters with preternatural speed and took aim at their heads with frightening accuracy. Their fear and anguish resonated deeply within him, he felt it, fed on it. And in turn it made him fearful that he was slipping too deeply to the Dark Side and that he would be lost in its dark currents forever.

Moments later, the fear he felt from them was replaced with a deep emptiness as their bodies hit the floor and convulsed before going limp. Yet his own remained. He took another deep breath, trying desperately to reign in his emotions. With little success. Sweat continued to roll down his face and onto the steel flooring of the facility. The artificial lighting overhead flickered as erratically as his breathing. Audio static still pounded in his ears.

"For the love of..." Arvalis sighed. "I just want off this frakking rock!"

A tingle at the base of his skull told him to take a step to the left. He had learned to trust his instincts. Mere moments later, a grid from up above banged onto the floor with a loud clang and the familiar red eye of his ID-10 seeker droid popped out from the air vent.

A series of gleeful beeps and boops were strung together, but they meant little to the Umbaran. But when the static in his ears fell away and gave rise to the voice of Major Celia Aurum, he knew what the droid was saying.

“Celia. Celia...slow down. Yes. Yes. Of course I have the data. Yes, the droid is still in one piece. No. No. NO I HAVEN'T BEEN SHOT. Picking up your transponder beacon now. I'll probably bring some friends along so have *Hesperus* man those turrets.”

The *Nightjar*'s electronic suite was running its decoder programming, its dedicated droidbrain sifting through numerous possible encryption protocols and bit by bit bringing the information Arvalis had retrieved on its small readout. There wasn't much of interest to Arvalis there at first as he nursed a cup of caf, the steam rising from the cup reminding him of the smoke rising from blaster burns.

When the console beeped, signaling that it finished parsing the contents of the datapad. There still wasn't anything of interest to Arvalis to be seen, but he knew his masters would be far more appreciative of the intel he had found.

“Contact Lords Halcyon and Rian, Scholae Palatinae are in danger.”

“Wouldn't it be best to let them be destroyed?” Celia chipped in over the intercom.

“That's not up to us to decide, Major.”