

"It has been said he who does not trust his instinct does not trust himself"

On the arid, patchy land of a distant planet, a single building looms in the shadow of night. The only luminescence revealing the shine of its sleek, metallic exterior is the full moon occupying the entire night sky. Within the walls of this large and unseemingly structure, men in sleek armor black as the bleakness of space itself march around the perimeter, drone around within the slender hallways that reside just a few feet under the ground of the main training floor, and silently conduct their training with not a single soul to observe their nightly ritual.

"Captain Ventis," spoke a deep, masculine voice augmented by a jet black helmet, fitting the rest of his armor perfectly all except for the white and red checkered pauldron on his shoulder, signifying his status as a Lieutenant. "Routine training is complete. All soldiers have been mandated to return to their quarters." the person he was speaking towards, Captain Ventis, took off his helmet to reveal a clean shaven man with long black hair bunched into a ponytail. A deep scar across his face was visible even in the cover of night, but the rest of his face looked youthful despite his decades as a right-hand man for Crime Lords, Smugglers, or anyone who reels in cash.

"Excellent. Brief the Sergeants about tomorrow. As you already know, we have some big plans for keeping the filthy Nobles in compliance with our financial operations in central Nayama. Give them the details of the plan and ensure it is followed tomorrow, if we make another false step you know have our heads."

The Lieutenant nodded and ran towards the ventral hangar where the Sergeants were already conducting pre-operation battle tactics. The Captain took a sharp breath in and turned to briskly walk towards the Officer quarters. For a reason he could not explain, he was at unease. He was a man of rational thought, he did not believe in luck, chance, or gut feeling. But on this particular night, his gut was telling him something bad was about to happen.

Miles above the desolate region of land marked by the Nayamans, a cluster of four mid-atmosphere combat transports cut through the thick clouds of the Seraphian atmosphere. Spearheading this cluster was a craft slightly smaller than the rest, inside it a group of troopers ready to carry out any mission they are assigned to the best of their extensive abilities. Leading these troopers was a tall, built man. Although he was tall and had a built physique, his spry face gave away his true age of 17. His name was known by few, but those who did feared the power harnessed by the Sith Knight, James Malum.

Holding onto the bar on the side of the craft's door stood his Sergeant, Cornella. Once he gave the command, the entire Platoon worth of soldiers would hurl themselves through the dense atmosphere of Seraph towards the Southern Chimian Outpost, where they are ordered to terminate all personnel in the Outpost. For months they had known of violent and powerful crime syndicates ravaging through the Nayama Dynasty, but just recently had their surveillance revealed to them a vital center for operations, at least within the Southern Region of Nayama. While James knew this single operation would not cripple the entire syndicate, it would disable operations in a geographical region and he had to do all that he could to prove his worth to the Empire through this mission.

"Sergeant, issue command at your ready." James spoke, the Sergeant took in a deep breath of the limited air supply offered by the oxygen deficient air and then yelled,

"FOR THE EMPIRE!"

The soldiers in unison raised their blasters above their heads and repeated "FOR THE EMPIRE!". They then began rushing towards the open side of the ship and plummeting towards the ground in a free fall they had been training for months for. Once each squad of 10 soldiers had exited their respective craft and started their aerial assault, James holstered his two A180's at his sides, slung his blaster across the back of his SpecForce chest plating, and strapped in the rest of his equipment. He looked down coldly at the ground miles below his feet; and before he let anxiety constrict the muscles in his body he leaned over and plummeted straight at the ground.

In the middle of his descent, he put his tactical helmet over his messy locks of hair, activating an interface in his helmet. As numbers, graphs, and symbols swirled around his peripheral sight, He saw his soldiers begin making their bodies rigid in order to gain more speed and he quickly followed. As he began gaining speed, the veil of dust in the atmosphere was broke and below them the Outpost they sought to destroy revealed itself. The large rectangular outpost was barely visible in the shroud of night, but was easily visible in contrast to the neutral and barren landscape that surrounded it. As the ground of the base slowly became larger in their field of sight, the sensors in the parachutes of the soldiers detected that the ground was not far below their feet and automatically deployed the jet black parafoil from each of their jetpacks. As they started descending towards the ground, firing shots towards the ground of the base and doing their best to make their movement erratic as to not get hit with the returning volley, James kept plummeting towards the base as he did not have a parachute.

“Gentlemen, time to have some fun. Keep your eyes sharp and your blaster thirsty for some blood.”

As the ground was almost upon him, he focused the Force flowing through his body into his legs and spun through the air, aligning his legs downwards toward the planet’s surface. As blaster bolts whirred near his head he abruptly slammed into the hard concrete ground of the base, absorbing the impact with his Force bound legs. He quickly reached over his shoulder and grabbed his blaster rifle, grasping it in two hands and firing it at the guards surrounding him. He quickly ran towards storage containers in the middle of the training field and slid over them, pressing his body to the side of the metal containers as to protect himself from the blaster fire coming from the guards and his own soldiers above. He quickly fired 3 rounds into the guards standing adjacent to his cover and then raised the rifle above the boxes and quickly pulled the trigger, blindly firing into the guards and praying that he hit one.

The Platoon of soldiers landed in the base, quickly dispatching of the small force firing at James. Although he was given decently sized armament for the mission, the small army within the base kept filing out from all four directions.

“Son of a banshee! Disperse and swarm on the major entry points!” James barked through the intercom of his helmet. Each soldier ran scattered from their Platoon formation and ran towards the doors of the outpost’s four corners and started firing into the doors, killing any soldier that attempted to enter the site through that point. The plan initially worked and the swarm of

enemies slowly died down. The medical troops began treating their wounded brothers and James took sharp breaths, casting away the black cloak he had been wearing.

The Knight's Chief of Operations, K'elvra D'arr, ran up to him and began giving the operational status. "Captain Malum, the ventral hangers and information systems junction should be right through the northward door. My technical sergeant reports that the door system is encrypted with a XA-199 encoding system. It's heavy duty stuff but my techie should be able to crack it in 15 minutes." James nodded in approval towards the man, who then proceeded towards the door where his Sergeant was already hard at work breaking the door.

As the Platoons started moving towards the main entrance to the interior of the Outpost, a rumbling shook them from below their feet. The ground in the middle of the training floor faulted, revealing blue lines in the shape of a rectangle. The plate that was defined by these glowing lines began lifting, revealing a frame of four pillars lifting the ground up. Standing in the frame was a group of 30 men holding various pistols, blasters, and thermal detonators, one even holding a vibro saber, They walked towards the group and aimed their weapons at the unsuspecting soldiers.

"Oh son of a b-" James started to mutter, but he was interrupted by his heart fluttering. He knew the feeling as his precognition informing him of danger and hit the floor, just missing a blaster bolt aimed straight for his head. He rolled out of the direct line of fire between his men, several of which now laying unceremoniously on the ground with smoulding bolts in their chest, and

the group of criminal foot soldiers advancing out of the frame. He reached out his arm and called upon the Force, reaching out through it like an ether and grabbing the large steel containers right behind the small army of goons. One of the criminals wielding a shoddy blaster spotted James in the corner of their eye and quickly spun to fire at James. Before the cartel soldier even lifted their blaster to their shoulders, James snapped his arm across his body, bringing the large crates he had gripped with the invisible hand of the force barreling towards the unsuspecting mob. The large crates snatched the heads of multiple foe, knocking them to the ground cold. He then buffered the momentum of the projectiles and laid them in front of the battlezone, allowing his soldiers to advance up and seek partial cover behind the thick steel.

“Dispose of them quick! We have 3 minutes until that ventral door opens!” James barked. He grabbed his saber and ignited it, grabbing a blaster pistol in his off-hand. He quickly ran in front of the small army, deflecting bolts with his saber and returning the fire with his blaster.

He swished his saber through the air, deflecting the onslaught of blaster bolts. He quickly ran towards the crowd, bolts flying around him from both directions. He ran towards the closest pole of the frame he could and leaped towards it, swinging around it and knocking down several of the foot soldiers. He then channeled his inner anger and passion, bottling up for long periods of time before combat. He swung his saber furiously, connecting with the soldiers immediately near him. Before their instinct kicked in and began open firing on James, he dropped to the floor just a heartbeat before they pulled the trigger, resulting in many firing into the bodies of their comrades. He

then broadly swept the legs of the soldiers now quickly losing on, causing them to unceremoniously fall to the floor, writhing in pain.

Despite what would appear to be a random flurry of aggression, James was an expert of Juyo, a saber form based around channeling rage, emotion, and dark emotions into a refined burst of aggressive combat. Every seemingly random motion is well thought and considered before executed, it is what makes Juyo a refined yet difficult art, harnessed stochastic things like emotion are considered one of the hardest things to master in combat.

After the Battalion shot down the remaining foot soldiers, the casualties were counted. Despite James gaining the upper ground in time the carnage was roughly 40 men, an entire Platoon worth of soldiers.

"We will come back for them, we need to continue." James spoke, solemnly looking over the men who had made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of this mission. He slowly turned his back, and directed his men towards the central hangar.

The ventral hangar was cold and metallic, as if they were inside a meat freezer. They slowly moved in a single file line, raising their blasters only when a suspicious sound was heard or to shoot out a security camera. After several hundred yards worth of crouching, the technical sergeant held up his hand in yield.

"This junction is it, one of these doors leads to the primary intelligence bank, we should probably divy up our numbers to cover more ground."

James agreed and pulled up uos data pad, he split up the technical battleteam into each unit and send them towards their respective corridors. As he worked into the central corridor with his Platoon he heard the sound of blasters behind him. Inside the corridor, several of his troops layed on the ground with smoldering holes in their chest, and commandos in black uniforms ran out from the corridors he sent them into. Before James could weigh the possibility that he had just unintentionally killed his entire Batallion, he bursted into a full sprint down the hall.

He ran into the end of the corridor and bursted through the unseeming door. Inside at the far end of the room, the information junction, in fact the exact junction they sought to capture, was lying meticulously in the room. He ran and slammed his decryption device into one of the numerous ports and activated it. A euphoria rushed over him as he realized his mission was near over, but as he turned around to go save his friends he was met by a fist directly to the nose.

James grabbed his nose in agony and looked up to see a familiar face. Plastered across the walls of cities in the form of wanted posters and

bounties racking up to millions of credits. The man, Aragon Ventis, wore a stern face as he unholstered his pistol.

“Get up, you bottom dwelling scum.” Ventis spoke condescendingly. James slowly got up and threw his saber across the floor, maintaining direct eye contact with the midnight eyes of the crime Lord and showing no emotion.

“Ventis, I believe we can be reasonable here. If you stop this now I will withdraw and the settlement will be preserved.” James spoke calmly. The sly face of the man hardened in disgust but then turned to laughter. “Do you seriously believe I would let you waltz out of my compout unscathed? You truly are dumber than I took you for oh-so-glorious Captain.” James maintained a hard look but then cracked a cold, sardonic grin. “I believe it may be a bit harder without that weapon of yours.” James grabbed the blaster Ventis was holding out of his back pocket and dropped it to the floor, sweeping it to the side.

Before Ventis could even comprehend how James had managed to steal his weapon in clear sight, the Knight kicked the crime Lord down and grabbed his saber with the force, pulling it into his hand with little effort. He ran towards Ventis, still recovering from the blow, and struck down hard at his body. Before the blade could connect, Ventis grabbed the Knight's wrists and pulled him down onto his foot, windmill kicking him over his body. The Knight quickly recovered and went for another blow, but Ventis kipped off the ground and drew his vibrosaber, igniting it just in time to swiftly parry the oncoming strike. They locked in a parry for several seconds attempting to

outmuscle one another, but their efforts were fruitless. They came apart and James immediately ran towards Ventis, aggressively barraging him with fast strikes. Although Ventis was a renown saber fighter his style of Soresu was more suited for long sweeping movements and blasters, not the meticulous yet erratic behavior of James.

They locked sabers once more and Ventis got the advantage, pushing James back into the hallway. As the Knight tried to sidestep and redirect the Lord's momentum, the cunning strategist saw right through James and cut across the front of his armor plate as he sidestepped. James quickly sprinted into the complex, the enraged criminal following soon after. Just as James turned around he lifted his saber in time to block the downward jumping strike of Ventis. James then saw a window of opportunity and rolled out of the trajectory of his enemies vibrosaber. He focused the energy of his body into as he kept dodging Ventis and suddenly sent that energy barreling towards Ventis, knocking him back into the wall. Within only a fraction of a second, Ventis landed on the wall with his legs, absorbing most all of the impact and dropping to the floor.

"Face it James, not even the Force is going to save you now." the Lord sneered. James replied by running towards Ventis, letting out a scream. Ventis soon followed, holding his saber over his head, ready to kill. They met and their sabers both came down, but before either could strike, James deactivated his saber and slid to the side of Ventis. Not expecting this maneuver, Ventis stumbled forward, leaving his back open. James quickly

slashed the back of the crime Lord who howled in pain and abruptly fell to the floor, silent.

James fell to the floor, breathing heavily. He layed there for several minutes processing all that had transpired within the last half an hour when he was interrupted with a familiar voice. "Good to see you lived, Captain Malum." spoke his Lieutenant who then appeared over him. James got to his feet to see many of his soldiers surrounding him, now torn to pieces by blaster fire.

"I... I was under the presumption those Commandos had killed you guys?" James asked inquisitively. The Lieutenant looked down near the floor, not being able to lock eyes. "Yes, two of the groups did get stormed, all confirmed dead. We caught them chasing you down and ambushed them from the back, luckily we got to them before they did to you." James grinned a bit, being thankful for being provided such an excellent team. But he quickly stopped the celebration. "Sergeant, please get the information from the junction. Everyone, file out. I have some personal business to attend to."

As the soldiers got loaded on the transports, James was still in the hallway. In his hand he was holding a hologram projector. Being projected was a hologram of Empress Elinicia Rei.

"I assume from the fact that you are still alive that the mission was a success." the Empress stated jokinly. James nodded, "All went according to plan, the Junction has been taken, this Outpost cleared, and Ventis is dead." The Empress nodded in approval. "Indeed. Excellent work Malum. Although you are quite aware that the job isn't over, you have helped rid this criminal

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Southern Chimian Outpost, Seraph

plague from our Dominion. I must leave, but know that you have served us well." and with that, the Empress cut off communication. James grinned, looked over at the soldiers calling his name, and he boarded the ship, ready for whatever may face him next.