

JORM NA'TREJ

EXCIDIVM



A COLLECTIVE DANGER

A CSPITAL STORY

The spaceport's airlock opened to the nightly air of Nar Shadaa's docks, specifically Private Bay 19 hosting the *Blaze*. Though 'air' was a generous term for the stench of fuel, grease, burned metal, booze, vomit and piss mixed with just enough oxygen to not let biological life forms pass out right away. Today, this distasteful arrangement was overshadowed by the offending smell of scorched meat and charred bone that greeted the returning crew.

"Bale, Calindra, overwatch," Jorm Na'trej, owner and pilot of the *Blaze* as well as commander of his small team ordered. His usual jocular attitude was not in evidence as he eyed his ship with Aylin in tow, searching for whomever had set off the high-voltage security mechanism.

"Do you hear that scratching," the young Nautolan girl asked her superior. Jorm scowled in response and forged ahead until he found the source of the smell.

"Fwec it, that fweccer still lives," he cursed when he found the intruder. A technician's overall was burned black around the shoulder that should have had an arm attached to it. Tendrils of smoke still rose from the fabric. An unnaturally pale face covered in the soot of its owners arm turned to snarl at them. Broken lips split in a rictus grin and delivered a hoarsely whispered battlecry.

"Death to the Force."

Veins bulged in the fiend's face as he pushed himself upright, his eyes distorted by a potent mix of drugs. Jorm fell back into his usual persona and issued his answer, a single bellicose "Hah!"

The pale soldier charged, and the Battlemaster drew and ignited his lightsaber. The artificial blade-shaped sun swung in a wide arc as Jorm somersaulted over the maimed man, only briefly and partially dimmed by the passage through an as-of-yet-unmaimed shoulder.

The pale berserker's second arm hit the floor with the metallic clang of a prosthesis, but he didn't seem to notice. In fact he turned on his heel and charged again.

"Death to the Force!"

Jorm rolled his eyes and displaced himself from the charge's path with a pirouette. His saber lashed out low this time, passing high through the stranger's thighs. The vapor from the cuts brought the stench of chemicals to the Kiffar's nose, and he ducked out of it.

A few steps away, and through an unimaginable combination of luck, skill, drugs and the universe doing things for fun, the pale man came to rest on the stumps of his thighs. With considerable effort, he waddled on his crippled limbs to face Jorm again.

*"DEATH TO THE FOORCEEE,"* he howled.

*"KNEE TO THE JAAAWS,"* Jorm answered in kind and made good on his words.

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Some time later, Jorm sat at the Dejaric table in *Blaze's* lounge and nursed his knee. The Collective agent had bit deep. Teeth of both bone and chrome laid on the table, but while they had drawn the blood that still caked them, they had not preserved their former owner's consciousness.

Now Jorm had his focus on the wound these teeth had inflicted, a crescent-shaped irregular incision that had broken skin, pierced muscle and sinew, and even scraped bone. But neither did those wounds stop the Battlemaster, nor did they persist for long under the Force's caress.

Two sets of light footfalls from the stern corridor announced the coming of his team's girls. Aylin appeared briefly in the door, waved, and left towards her quarters without a word. Her skin was a pale shade of green that Jorm had not thought possible. Calindra on the other hand looked normal enough as she entered the lounge. Without asking, she commandeered the ambient controls and set the heaters, ventilation and lighting in the lounge into overdrive. The effect was a passable imitation of a desert world container backyard. Apparently she wasn't so well after all.

"That bad," Jorm inquired.

"Pretty much. He's a tough one... we literally had to cut him open and have Aylin jack into his implants," Calindra replied and sat opposite of her boss.

Jorm gestured towards the fridge in the corner and substituted the walk over with a mental command. A dark bottle jumped into his hand, followed closely by two small glasses. He poured from Calindra's iced wine and pushed one of the drinks over to her.

"Thanks," she said as she took a sip, then she produced her datapad and displayed its contents on the Dejaric table to start off her report.

"Alright. Between Bale's liberal application of questions and violence, Aylin's slicing, and my own probing, we found out a handful of details before he went comatose. First, his job here was to place a tracking device on the *Blaze*. Aylin sent her droid to check, it got vaporized along with our guest's arm and only left a scorch mark on the hull."

"Nothing a paintjob can't fix," Jorm commented. "What else?"

“Orders. He was to move to a rendezvous point to meet up with other Collective elements for a strategic strike. Funny enough, the coordinates point away from Caperion.”

“That’s funny, alright. You’re the spy gal here, Cali - any ideas who they want to pounce?”

Calindra sat back and swirled the rest of her wine around, staring into the glass. Deep creases of concentration adorned her forehead.

“There are several possible targets, but considering the Collective’s disposition towards the Force as a whole and the Brotherhood in particular... the *Paragon*. Taldryan’s flagship and current base of operations. They are reduced to a fleet-based existence, much like we were before we carved our own piece out of Caperion.”

Jorm keyed a request into the table and got rewarded with a hologram of the star cruiser.

“Tough beast. How do you value the Collies’ chances?”

“Tough to say, Jorm. I suspect the data our prisoner received is incomplete, so I have to assume they can actually pull it off.”

“When?”

“Two days. Three at the outside,” Calindra answered.

The Kiffar placed his elbows on the table and supported his head in his hands while he stared at the data laid out before him. “That’s not enough time for any kind of official communication. Scholae and the Tallies aren’t that friendly,” he mused out loud.

“We could just not say anything,” Calindra suggested, “Taldryan is a rival after all.”

“True enough, but I wonder...” Jorm replied.

His hands sunk to the tabletop and rapped out a quick tattoo while Jorm was lost in thought, then he wiped the holograms off the surface and summoned three new ones. An Acklay, a Nexu, and a Rancor came to glowing life.

“Say we don’t warn the Tallies,” Jorm started and pointed at the Rancor, “and the Collies get the drop on them.”

The holographic Nexu snuck around the back of the Rancor and pounced, tearing flesh molded from light out of its neck to stand triumphant over the shimmering carcass.

“Then we are down one Clan, without the Collies suffering anywhere near the same losses. Worse yet, Scholae’s forces are already being tracked, so they’re targeting us too. Agreed?”

The little Nexu turned to face the Acklay representing the Imperial Clan, and Calindra nodded.

“But if the Tallies were aware of the danger,” the Battlemaster continued and reset the hologram, “things may look a little different.”

The Nexu went after the Rancor again, but the beast was aware this time and faced the catlike predator head-on. The resulting fight ended with the Rancor battered and , but the Nexu dead in a puddle of holographic blood.

Jorm sat back again and crossed his arms. “I can live with *that* result. Tell Bale to wrap our guest up in a present, and add a copy of your data. We’ll tip the Tallies off.”

“Are you sure the Empress will approve,” Calindra inquired.

“She’ll approve. If not... well, she’s too far away to call that shot,” Jorm stated with a smile.

“Oh, and Cali? Add a flower bouquet and an air refresher for the Tallies. Their ship must smell like the port here by now.”



