STAR WARS

Accidental Recruit

By Atra Ventus

#11708

Klaxons wailed and lights flashed as Nejj Ithurinos struggled to concentrate. The Zeltron sat in meditation, nestled behind some cargo crates in the ship's hold. His orange-red skin almost match the warning lights that had taken over for the prior illumination, though it could be seen clearly as it passed over the tapestry of lines and archaic Jedi symbols inked into the flesh of his arm. After a few more solid minutes of attempted focus, Nejj finally gave up with a heavy sigh.

"So much for a quiet trip," Nejj thought aloud. He uncrossed his legs with a wince, feeling returning in a tingling rush of blood, and sighed while ruffling his fingers through his short, curly hair. A purple strand managed to slip over his right eye before being brushed back to join the rest of the mess. The Zeltron finally made his way out from his hiding place. He glanced around, his yellow gaze looking for anything to explain the sudden cacophony. At the same time, he hummed a cheery tune with his hands clasped behind his back.

It didn't take long for Nejj to find his way into the ship proper. It was there he found all the commotion. Bodies rushed by like blurs as the ship's crew made for the airlocks. The Zeltron's face contorted with his lips pursed, a look of downright consternation falling upon him. "Excuse me—yes, hello—hey—you there—" He tried desperately to catch anyone's attention, but they were too focused on their task.

Well, clearly he wasn't making headway. What a curious situation it had become. With a shrug and a return to his humming, Nejj figured he might as well go with the flow and joined the crowd.

"So," Nejj shouted to the lady he had fallen into stride next to. The woman turned her head and gave him a quick once-over, instantly noting his attire stood apart from the rest of the crew. "Where're we goin'?"

A look passed over the woman's face that betrayed she knew he wasn't part of the crew, but then it morphed into something resembling a shrugged, "what the hell..."

"Responding to a distress call. Escape pods from *Psi Termina I*," she explained over the din.

Nejj's brow furrowed with concern. "Of course, that must be why I'm here! The will of the masters!"

"Right," the woman replied, drawing the word out alongside her incredulity. "We gotta save whoever we can, but those bastards are taking pot shots on anything coming into range."

"The bad kind of shots, right?"

"Yes, the bad kind."

"This seems like a terrible plan," Nejj remarked.

"We could always use an extra heat source to distract them," the woman threatened with a nod towards the nearby viewport.

That got Nejj's attention. "Well, you need people of intelligence on this sort of mission...quest...thing!"

"Oh, how very kind of you! Then hop down there," she shouted and pointed, starting to head down another hallway. "Smart boy like you can figure out the turret, aye?"

Nejj didn't have time to argue as he was abandoned. Just a man left blinking in confusion. He needed to focus on what he could control, though. Be the change! He had to help, or else why would he be there? So, Nejj slapped himself several times before turning to hop into the turret. Instead, he fell into it as he misjudged the first step. An unceremonious yelp and crash announced his mounting of the turret.

Finding himself upside down in the seat, Nejj scrambled to turn himself upright and grasp the dual handles of the turret's control system. "Okay, okay. You're an Ithurinos! You can figure this out, Nejj. Totally. Got this. You got this. I got this...got this," he repeated as if the mantra would make reality all on its own.

Nejj found the nearby headset and popped it onto his ears. He winced as the static first crackled to life before fading into overlapping voices. Nejj chose to tune out any sound that wasn't a location of incoming threats. If he didn't, he would be quickly overwhelmed. Nejj slapped his cheeks several times as he hyped himself up. Leaning forward, he let out an excited yip and grabbed the controls.

That's when a sudden flash of light and explosion rocked his pod.

"Oh, come on!" Nejj shouted as the system hissed and sparked, smoke filling the foxhole. He pouted loudly and leaned back with a whine, his turret left a scorched ruin and unable to respond to commands.

"I guess...I was just meant to watch," Nejj murmured while staring up at the ceiling, way higher than it should be since he had dropped into the turret's cubby. "This sucks..."

Still, Nejj hoped they would be able to save at least a few people. And, perhaps, since his activated turret had been enough of a distraction to get targeted, it might have afforded someone else a brief reprieve...and a chance to survive.

"Would be a lot easier if I could just punch them," Nejj whined.