Andrelious pulled his TIE Defender out of hyperspace. As always, he checked his ship’s sensor readouts even before his starfighter had even slowed down to its regular sublight speed.

“*Psi Termina I,* this is A.J. Mimosa-Inahj of Clan Taldryan. What is your status?” the Sith asked into his ship’s comm.

The IGV-55 did not respond. Instead, Mimosa-Inahj was treated to the sight of the *Psi Termina I* exploding.

*Frak. They’re still ramming things to death. How many of these fanatical bastards are there*? Andrelious thought to himself.

He was already cursing his decision to accept a job from Marick…

**2 hours earlier**

**Mimosa-Inahj homestead**

**Elysia**

**Caelus System**

“Poppeliamarissia Mimosa-Inahj! Stop squabbling with your sister and eat your breakfast!” Andrelious ordered his older twin.

The identical three-year olds giggled at their father. They seemed to know just how to push the right buttons to get a reaction, yet look completely innocent just moments later. The former Imperial could never stay cross with his children for long.

“Please, girls. Your brother’s tired,” Kooki interjected, peering down at Mostynn as he sipped his mother’s milk. The baby’s eyes started to shut as he continued to feed.

“He sleep soon Mummy?” Etty asked gently as she planted a soft kiss on the side of her brother’s head.

“He won’t if you don’t leave him to feed. There’s a blue milk for each of you in the kitchen,” Andrelious responded. The twins scuttled away to find their drinks.

The former Imperial was surprised by how much he was enjoying the simplicity of family life. Around Kooki and his children, he didn’t need to wave a lightsaber around, shoot anyone, or even speak in an aggressive manner. He knew that one day he and Kooki would train their children in the ways of the Force, but for now, they could all enjoy each other’s company.

Andrelious was just finishing the last of his caff when the holocomm unit beeped to indicate an incoming communication.

“At this time of the morning? Really?” Kooki complained.

Andrelious answered the call, but he wasn’t expecting to see the form of Marick Tyris appear.

“Andrelious. It’s been a while,” the Voice began.

“Is that really a surprise? I know that you’re something to do with the Inquisitorius. And I’m sure you’re aware that we’re not exactly fans of *that* organisation,” the former Imperial stately dryly.

“Things change. We don’t answer to Pravus anymore. Surely stopping the Collective is something that you can get on board with?” Marick questioned.

Andrelious had to admit that the Hapan had a point. The Collective were proving to be far more than a nuisance. Their goal of purging every single Force user from the galaxy still seemed a ludicrous pipe dream, but they had come off quite well in the their conflicts with the Brotherhood and its clans.

“Very well. What are you after?” the Sith queried.

“Our intelligence network suggests that the Collective are planning an attack one of our listener ships. We’ve put together a small starfighter force, but I need some more top level pilots. You were one of the first names I thought of. You always were one of Arcona’s best,” Tyris explained.

Andrelious sighed. “And now I’m one of Taldryan’s best. After your successor decided to force Arcona into an alliance with the Odanites. Still, send me the coordinates. I’ll meet your men there,”

“You’ll be working with Lux Venia. She doesn’t have the Force, but she’s easily the best pilot we have on our books. Try not to upset her,” Marick answered, ending the communication before Andrelious could offer a retort.

**-x-**

“All wings, *Psi Termina I* is down. Stay tight,” Lux Venia ordered. “Mimosa-Inahj, what’s your status?”

“No time to chat, Miss Venia! We’ve got multiple bogeys incoming. Looks like they’re going to cover the retreat,” Andrelious responded.

“Time to spoil their party! Everyone pick a target!” Venia declared.

“You heard her. Engage! Show me how well the Iron Navy trains its pilots,” Andrelious added.

Venia and Mimosa-Inahj each led a full squadron of TIE Defenders. They were outnumbered by Collective fighters, and with the *Psi Termina I* destroyed, they lacked any additional support from a capital ship, whilst the Collective’s fleet of modified cruisers and frigates threatened to shoot down any Brotherhood pilot who got too close for too long.

“There’s so many of them. The bombers will get slaughtered,” one of the other pilots stated in a worried tone.

“We only have to keep them busy. Command’s got something else in mind for the enemy fleet,” Lux answered.

Andrelious hadn’t met Lux Venia before, but he was already impressed with her fast, no-nonsense communication. He didn’t know quite what to expect from the female’s actual piloting skills, but, as the Collective squadrons closed in, he was sure that he’d find out.

“Break formation in…3…2…1..now!” the Sith ordered. His squadron scattered right as the first enemy fighters came into range. A little distance away, Venia’s squadron broke apart, too. The Collective fighters appeared to be caught out by the tactic, and took a few moments to adapt their own flight paths.

Lux allowed herself a smile as she manoeuvred her TIE Defender into position behind an enemy Z-95 Headhunter. She didn’t even need to look at her targeting computer to know exactly when to let fly with a salvo of laser fire that soon turned the Collective starfighter into a fireball.

Andrelious wasn’t very far behind with his first kill, having also easily steered his ship behind an enemy Z-95. He’d killed dozens of Headhunters over his long career in the cockpit, but the satisfaction of adding another to his tally never got old. There was no time to celebrate, however, as an alarm indicated one the Collective X-Wings was trying to acquire a missile lock.

“Apex squadron, somebody get onto that X-Wing!” the Sith commanded.

Two of Andrelious’ wingmen obliged and started to close in on the X-Wing, which was being flown with such organic movement that it seemed that the starfighter itself was alive. Even with two Iron Navy pilots chasing it down, the X-Wing continued to stay on Andrelious.

*Enough of this*! Andrelious thought to himself, pulling his throttle back. As the engines cut to an almost complete halt, the Taldryanite smirked as his pursuer shot past, completely caught out by the unorthodox tactic.

“Nice one! There’s not even anything on your record about that!” Lux stated. Andrelious wondered exactly what ‘record’ the female was talking about as he watched his two wingmen eliminate the X-Wing.

“*Wrath* coming in now!” Mimosa-Inahj declared, watching as the Resurgent-class ship entered the area on the far side of the departing Collective fleet.

“That’s no good! They’ll just hyper away!” a pilot announced.

“Yeah! Is the *Waylay* on its way?” another asked.

“Wait and see!” Lux replied. Only her and Andrelious were aware of the plan; the *Wrath* indeed had no way of stopping the Collective fleet from escaping. Grand General Rhell had something else in mind.

The remainder of the *Wrath’s* starfighter complement launched in almost perfect synchronisation with each other. Andrelious was reminded of an Imperial starfighter wing flying into battle.

“Welcome to the party, boys! About time you came for a piece of the action!” Venia stated in between shooting down X-Wings.

The new arrivals didn’t take long to be noticed. Several of the squadrons that were desperately fighting the TIE Defenders broke off, whilst even more squadrons, again mostly Z-95 Headhunters, launched from the Collective fleet.

“They’re the secondary squadrons. Flown by droids. They’re well programmed, but no match for an organic pilot,” Andrelious explained.

“This is Apex Seven! I’ve lost all power to my-“ a pilot screamed, his voice cut off and his craft exploded.

Lux Venia cursed as she watched the wreckage that was Apex Seven explode into smaller and smaller pieces.

“This plan had better be worth it, Tyris,” she said to herself.

Meanwhile, the Collective fleet adjusted their course to avoid the *Wrath*. Andrelious and Lux both noticed how they turned in perfect unison.

“They must think we were born yesterday,” Venia commented.

“Bombers, focus on the lead ships. Razor Twelve, that means you too,” Andrelious announced.

Razor Twelve’s pilot, a Human male called Frimlin Brantil, switched his TIE Bomber’s firing system to its main payload at the same time as his wingmates, but he wasn’t carrying bombs. As his targeting computer acquired a lock on one of the Collective’s modified Strike Cruisers.

The *Wrath* started to fire its turbolasers at the enemy fleet, focusing most fire on the Escort Carrier in the centre of the formation.

“Keep an eye out for more of those tugs!” Andrelious ordered.

“They’ll launch them when they’re about to jump. You watch,” Lux added.

With the Collective fighter screen divided into two, the Iron Navy Bombers were able to drop their payloads almost completely unimpeded. Their bombs tore through several of the larger enemy ships, leaving the Collective with their Lancer Frigates, two Strike Cruisers, three Dreadnaughts and a badly damaged Escort Carrier.

“Razor Twelve here. Payload delivered to enemy ship designated *Wenlock*!” Brantil announced.

Andrelious shot down another X-Wing as he watched what was left of the enemy fleet jump to hyperspace. The Escort Carrier seemed to hesitate for a few moments, but soon joined its comrades in retreat. The Sith soon saw why.

“There are three full squadrons of suicide tugs heading for the *Wrath!* Shoot them down NOW!” Andrelious ordered, finishing off the last of the Z-95s.

Lux Venia was not about to see another ship fall to the Collective’s brutal tactics. Her TIE Defender zoomed through the debris of battle, followed by an Andrelious who was equally determined to stop the Collective in its tracks. The survivors from the *Wrath*’s squadrons were already firing on the tugs, but were finding the sheer speed of the kamikaze pilots a little harder to handle than they’d been expecting.

Andrelious ignored his targeting computer, relying instead on the Force. He was amazed to find that every single Quadrijet tug was flown by an organic pilot, but all he could sense among the pilots was a single minded intent to destroy themselves, all for Rath Oligard’s cause.

Lux, Andrelious, and what was left of the Iron Navy’s squadrons did their best to shoot down the tugs, but half a dozen managed to hit their target. The *Wrath*, although not entirely destroyed, was damaged enough to require significant downtime.

The Brotherhood’s victory had come at a cost.

**-x-**

“You’re pretty good at what you do,” Andrelious stated as he handed Lux a beer.

The female pilot smiled.

“I’ll admit. The files we have on you are surprisingly patchy given how well Tyris seems to know you. But they weren’t wrong about your skills,” Venia answered.

“The files say what I want them to say,” the Sith explained. “Let’s just celebrate,”

**-x-**

Marick Tyris studied his datapad. Frimlin Brantil’s attack had done exactly what it was supposed to do.

With the tracking device firmly implemented aboard the *Wenlock,* things would soon look up.