

Intrepid
A Rite of Supremacy: Meridian Story
Alaris Jinn
9426

“...there are no innocents...”

Kessel

The air was stale and metallic. The constant sound of leather boots clanging the side of a durasteel workstation helped with the general mechanical aura of the control room. There were soft mumbblings between station operators and the whirr from droid servos and the occasional whistling or beeping. Tension sat throughout the chamber like a thick fog; so palpable it could almost be tasted.

RX-74 argued against his own expertise, something that was rare for the arrogant droid, but here he found himself away from the safe confines of his shuttle's cockpit, messing around in some strange computer. He had relished the opportunity to navigate the Corkscrew and the rest of the Channel, but poking for answers inside what was likely safeguard-infested-cyberspace was not his idea of a good time.

The mess that had once been the mine's station operator, Efram Vias, had long been cleaned up. An Inquisitorius vessel had come and acquired Vance Kordall. ReX's master had been muttering about how he would have preferred to kill the leaky faucet, but was reminded of his orders to bring him back alive. This left RX-74 alone to clean up the mess of what was now his mining operation. On paper, 40% of the mine had still belonged to Capital Enterprises, but it had been several days now and with a few keystrokes and some clever finagling, if ReX didn't say so himself, the company that owned this mine had dissolved and sold its holdings to FNG Industries.

Now, he was charged with locating the persistent pinging that came through the system every few hours. ReX was certain that it was CE trying to ascertain as much information about FNG Industries as possible. It was a shell company owned by a shell company owned by another five shell companies that had a board of directors filled with people who didn't exist.

The constant banging that his master's charge, that little red alien, kept pounding into the workstation she had propped herself on wasn't so much bothering ReX as it was simply irritating him. He was bustling around in what was likely Collective databases, but they were cleverly enough disguised that he didn't like the distraction.

He squealed out a series of pointed beeps and whistles directed at the little twerp. Kahlora Teka stopped immediately and raised her arms in defiance.

“What?!” she yelled at the droid.

“He says, ‘stop your infernal racket or he’ll tear your legs out of their sockets.’” TC-818, ReX’s counterpart, had a sense of amusement in his voice, almost as if he was edging on the young girl. That hadn’t been quite what he had said, but ReX was pleased with the translation, nonetheless.

The Togruta jumped off her perch and readied herself to dive at the droid. “Oh, is that so?! Let’s see how this little karkstain operates without any of his freaking little arms!”

“Enough!” The sound came from the open door of the operator’s office on the other side of the control room. ReX squealed in protest, but his master, Alaris Jinn, appeared in the doorway and pointed straight at the pilot droid. “Especially from you. We’ve been here longer than I have tolerated and you’re making me consider adding an astromech to my droid compliment to replace you for these situations.”

That shut ReX up immediately. He whistled a terse apology then turned back to his work. He whirred quiet insults about Alaris’s apprentice for a few seconds then stopped abruptly. He had found what he had been looking for. He whistled excitedly at his master.

“Meridian,” the protocol droid translated. “The inquiries are coming from Meridian itself.”

Wild Space

Meridian Prime Space Station

Occasional whirs from ReX’s servos were all Alaris could hear other than his own breath. The philosophy of stealth made everybody assume that silence was required. There is so much communication in space that it is often forgotten that sound does not exist in the void. Unless two ships are literally touching, sound cannot pass between them without electronic assistance. Despite this, the five beings, organic or otherwise, currently on board the matte black Upsilon shuttle were dead silent.

Alaris loved the silence. His apprentice was inquisitive and was constantly asking questions. The Twi’lek was pleased at her eagerness, but being able to spend a few hours in silence was a blessing he would not take for granted.

The shuttle slowly inched its way across the vastness toward the massive structure floating in the abyss. There were no planets or stars anywhere near it, so with a lack of depth perception, it

was nearly impossible to tell just how large it was. If Alaris hadn't done his homework he would have been impressed by its size.

The silence finally broke. "What exactly is the plan, Master?"

The Twi'lek glanced over at his apprentice, before returning his gaze to the super structure. He spoke plainly. "They were inquiring about FNG Industries. We're going to introduce them to FNG."

The door to the cockpit slid open and there stood Mira Dantavi. The dress she had clad herself in clung to her snugly. Her hair was curled up tightly in a bun and her make-up was touched up with subtlety, save the bright red lipstick which contrasted her chocolate skin.

Alaris spoke clearly as if introducing Mira to a sovereign. "Olivia Girardi, daughter of Francis Girardi, and CFO of FNG Industries."

"A responsibility I inherited from my brother after his untimely death," Mira's false Kuati accent was perfect. "Daddy wanted me involved in some way, and this gives me the opportunity to learn on the job for when I take over the company one day."

Alaris turned back to the viewport and leaned forward. "ReX, deactivate stealth mode and raise the station on comms."

There was an audible pitch increase as power was restored to all major systems and the shuttle was suddenly a bright light on all sensor beacons as "Intrepid." It did not take long for a fighter escort to join them and a response from the other side.

"Shuttle Intrepid, what is your reason for approach?"

Alaris leaned into the microphone. He rounded his vowels, his accent taking on a Corellian dialect. "CE station, Meridian, this is Shuttle Intrepid. Carrying VIP from FNG Industries."

There was a delayed response before a new voice came over the comm. *"Shuttle Intrepid, we repeat. What is your reason for approach?"*

Alaris again replied, "Meridian, this shuttle is carrying a VIP from FNG Industries. Requesting meeting with Capital Enterprises executives."

An almost amused the voice on the other side continued, *"You do not have a scheduled appointment. Please state the nature of your visit."*

Mira shot her voice up and let it carry. "Our company recently acquired several holdings, mostly shipping companies, a few mining facilities, and a robotics foundry and I noticed several

discrepancies in the flimsiwork: specifically ownership information that lists Capital Enterprises. I want to ensure that our transactions were above board and to negotiate an arrangement if not.”

Another long delay before a response came. Kahlora blinked and bounced her leg nervously, but a quick glance from Alaris calmed her. “*Shuttle Intrepid. Please continue on your current course. Docking bay three is clear and awaiting your arrival.*”

A simple double click in response and the comm channel was then cleared of contact. “You heard the woman, ReX: docking bay three.”

Wild Space
Meridian Prime Space Station
Docking Bay Three

“Your ship is a First Order vessel.” The dockmaster looked at it with intrigue as he approached. Alaris could see him through the viewport scurrying forward and his voice carried enough to be picked up on Mira’s active commlink.

“It actually belongs to me.” Mira spoke clearly to be heard across the docking bay if anyone was paying close enough attention. “My father is a long time investor in Sienar. It made sense to use shuttles from them rather than Kuat or CEC.” She turned to admire *her* ship. “Plus, she’s imposing, and I like that.”

TC-818 wasn’t far behind her and spoke tersely. “Ma’am, we *do* have a schedule to keep.”

The dockmaster escorted the two bipeds away from the shuttle, which entered into lockdown protocol. There was so much commotion at the front of the vessel that nobody noticed two small figures in all black slip out through a lower docking clamp down into the ventilation system below.

“Rule number one,” Kahlora muttered under her breath, “there is always a ventilation shaft.”

Alaris kept his chuckle silent as the two crawled underneath the docking bay. “Or a garbage chute.”

The Togruta shuddered at the thought. “I don’t even want to know how you discovered that one.”

Alaris reached out through the Force and found that the pathway below them was clear for the next few seconds. In near silence, the two small Dark Jedi landed in the corridor below and within a few minutes they had made their way into civilian areas.

They trudged along being careful not to let their faces be seen. There were enough Twi'leks and Togruta on board that they were able to blend in fairly easily, but anything to keep them from being spotted by the Shikari was welcome. As they walked, Kahlora picked up any grime or grease and smeared it on her face to help ensure that.

"What exactly are we doing here?"

Alaris didn't even bother to look at her. "You tell me."

She thought about it as they walked amongst the throngs. She reached her answer within a few moments then tentatively responded, "Revenge. They were poking into your investments and holdings and you want to make sure they know that's not welcome."

Her master raised an eyebrow. "That's a touch more crude than I would have phrased it, but you're not entirely incorrect."

"So what's the plan?"

Alaris locked eyes with his apprentice. "Make a mess." A smile slowly crept across his face. "And don't clean it up."

His smile was met with glee from his apprentice. "And you?"

"I've called in another favor."

Getting to the upper tier was easy enough when one was dressed to impress. Alaris has shirked his cloak and looked the part. His well tailored suit screamed luxury and money. The only thing that could have given him away as someone who didn't belong would have been his lightsaber, but had entrusted that to his apprentice. He stopped every once in a while and made small talk with other dignitaries and elites; mostly pleasantries, but also spreading multiple false names throughout the station.

He eventually made his way to the stock exchange and pulled out his datapad. The exchange itself was a massive round room, with hundreds of monitors floating amongst the relative chaos

of market trading. It was metallic and nearly clinical. Billions of credits passed hands here every hour and it appeared that the Collective wanted to make sure its clients felt like royalty.

Meridian had thousands of incoming and outgoing transmissions every minute and Alaris just added another. He keyed in a transmission code and immediately access to multiple accounts sprung to life in his hands. He let the team on the other end start doing the work: small buys and sells, but nothing that would send up any red flags. It had cost him a few favors, but it would all be worth it.

An hour passed and he started to feel, more than hear, subtle panic from multiple people across the floor. He kept his eyes on his datapad and leaned over to the person closest him, some middle aged human. "Have you heard what's happening on the lower decks?" he asked. He didn't even need to apply the dark side to his suggestion, the man immediately got on his comm. After a few seconds his eyes widened and he started frantically punching away at his datapad.

It begins.

The screams that echoed through the lower chambers were necessary. There were no innocents on Meridian. They were all complicit with the Collective. They would all die eventually, and today seemed like the best day to start. Those on the upper levels began to hear stories about the slaughter in the lower levels and now the tension in the air was thick enough to taste. The first of the day's downticks on the market began, and they would not be the last.

Alaris followed suit, frantically looking up and down from his datapad. On the outside, he looked as panicked as everyone else. On the inside, he was the very definition of serene. He was winning. The markets began to freefall and stock prices plummeted to lower levels than the market had seen in cycles. He flicked his eyes to a few men wearing CE identifiers who began pointing at the marketplace monitors and yelling into their commlinks.

"Now," he whispered into his own commlink and within two seconds, one of the largest buy programs Alaris had ever attempted pumped out thousands of purchases per second. Most of the purchases looked like opportunistic shell companies trying to buy up majority stock in smaller outer rim companies, but Alaris had bigger fish in mind: Capital Investments.

Alaris's timing could not have been better. The entire wall of stock information shut down and went to pure blackout. The panic had put Capital Enterprises on alert and they finally shut down the entire stock exchange in an emergency effort not to completely collapse Meridian's stock market. In addition, dozens of seemingly faceless lackies began to file in to help keep the panicked masses in relative calm.

Time to go.

Alaris, still breathing heavily in his faux panic, scurried for the soft rounded edge of the exchange, rounding his way to the exit. He slid in with the rest of the throngs. Hundreds of entitled elites pushed their way toward their respective hangar bays trying to get themselves to safety. It was times like this he valued his diminutive stature, because he was beyond sure that the Collective had caught on to something.

Two taps on his commlink brought his attention to his wrist. Kahlora was safe. He had half expected her to die down there, but she had managed to get herself back to the shuttle and was pinging in from there. He knew TC-818 would be shuffling “Olivia” back to the safety of her shuttle to get her back home where “Daddy’s waiting.”

Alaris had to give Capital Enterprises credit: they were extremely well organized. In a matter of thirty minutes, they had everyone back to their shuttles or luxury suites and were in the process of launch protocol. The Twi’lek wasn’t certain that ACE would have been as efficient. The hustle and bustle in hangar bay three was enough that it wasn’t noticed that someone was getting on the matte black Upsilon shuttle who had never officially disembarked. Forty-seven minutes after the SX blackout, *Shuttle Intrepid* was out of the hangar and launching itself toward the hyperspace lanes to take it into the mid-rim.

Once the stars burst by them and the calming blue haze of hyperspace overtook the viewport, only then did organic aspect of the crew released their tension.

“Well done, everyone,” Alaris called out. “Mira, any issues?”

She tossed her hair, “Not one. I don’t *like* playing stupid, but it’s really effective.”

Alaris reached over and grabbed his datapad to review his success. 2492 shell companies all now each owned five stocks or less in nearly two dozen separate Capital Investments subsidiaries, of which a thousand would direct funds to the Brotherhood’s Regent. “Stealing money from the Collective to fight the Collective,” he muttered under his breath. “Not a bad day’s work.”

He looked back over at Mira. “Who was it you met with?”

Mira took a bite out of a ration bar and talked through her chewing. “Some woman named, A’Theri. We worked out an arrangement to return 50% of the holdings to CE.”

Alaris had stopped listening and his jaw dropped slightly. He swore loudly, and then, as if on cue, the shuttle jerked violently and was ripped out of hyperspace. ReX started squealing angrily, throwing blame on everything but himself, completely unaware of the i40 Medium Cruiser staring them down.

The Chief Inquisitor silenced him, "Shut up, ReX. Engage stealth mode immediately. If they wanted us dead, they would have targeted us on our escape vector from the station." The hum and whirs of the shuttle dimmed and eventually cut out completely, leaving only the ship's life support and basic maneuvering thrusters in operation.

"Master?"

The Dark Jedi narrowed his eyes and sneered. "They want us? They're going to have to come find us."