

STALK'D

A STAR WARS STORY BY:
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There had been several times throughout recent weeks TK-246 had the suspicion he was being watched, even followed. A former Special Forces stormtrooper who to this day goes by his father's old Imperial designation to most and Hel only to his closest friends, TK-246 was now a member of Taldryan's military forces and had been asked to oversee the modifications and enhancements of the Factory Xesh-5 facility on Iosan to a suitable military garrison. Over the last couple weeks, there had been a huge overture of personnel coming and going from the old refinery, making it hard for even him to keep track of every detail.

The first instance occurred during his very first day on the industrialized moon. The Commander had been in one of the auxiliary hangars, overseeing the arrival of vital research and server hardware for the Sphere of Research and Intelligence. As they departed hangar to escort the shipment from the cargo vessel to what would be the garrison's main research lab with two officers, an uneasiness washed over him and the Scoundrel turned to find no-one there. The second instance, TK-246 was walking alone down one of the main factory corridors and again the same feeling came over him, with no-one there.

During the most recent occurrence the half-breed was in the mess hall, minding his own business and just attempting to eat his breakfast tray of food alone when he was approached by an officer who wanted to go over the day's shipping manifest. As the two officers discussed the matter, the feeling once again conquered Hel's body and jerked round to find the regular on-goings of a mess hall.

Hangar Bay Alpha 2 SRI Task Force Uru Headquarters Iosan, Caelus System

The moderately sized, bronzed and rustic metal hangar bays of the former Factory Xesh-5 refinery were much less chaotic than they had been in recent weeks. Previously, the facility had been full of commotion as countless officers, technicians, cargo pilots, and labourers each went in their own direction throughout the large-scale factory. It was under orders from the head of the Sphere of Research and Intelligence— and Quaestor of House Ektrosis, Justinios Drake that the facility be upgraded to serve as a base of operations for their military task force.

With the retrofit of the former Clouzon-36 refinery into a hardened military and intelligence operations garrison as well as a small auxiliary research facility for the Sphere of Research and Intelligence, any non-essential or non-military personnel had for the most part been reassigned and moved from the facility. Now, the only people that regularly occupied the hangars were a few cargo

pilots, and Task Force Uru personnel ranging from a few guards to technicians, to officers assigned to manage the shipping and receiving of military goods and any research materials sent by the Sphere.

The changes made to Factory Xesh-5 had been conducted in such a speedy manner, the Sphere had not had enough time to provide everyone with a proper filtering breath mask. Only personnel deemed absolutely essential had been given one thus far, with the promise of more arriving within the month. Although a lot of the soldiers wore helmets that purified and cleaned the air of toxins, many other personnel did not. A full medical bay had been setup to accommodate any sicknesses caused by the inhalation of harmful gases while working in the hangar bays, with people encouraged to use the service for fear of a mild mutiny.

The blue magnetic field at the large end of Hangar Bay Alpha 2 opened temporarily, allowing an incoming *Sentinel*-class landing craft– and toxic gases from the moon’s industrialized surface– to enter into the clean atmospheric area. Just as quickly as the field had been disengaged did the shuttle pass through the port into the bay, magnetic field snapping back to life a split moment later. Although the bay had only been opened for a moment, enough dark gases had entered the area to give a slight haze to the air around the people operating in the hangar. Several unarmored technicians, helmetless pilots, and even an officer started to cough harshly, covering their mouths as best they could.

Immediately, the facility’s old air purification system began to go to work by slowly scrubbing the air clean inside the hangar. The coughing continued for only a short while, before the air was returned to normal and acceptable operating levels.

The shuttle that entered the hangar finished folding its bottom two wings and touched down mere feet in front of TK-246, who hadn’t flinched as it came in for a landing; instead occupied by the score of information running across the screen of his datapad. A former Special Forces stormtrooper who to this day goes by his father’s old Imperial designation to most and Hel to his closest friends, TK-246 was now a member of Taldryan’s military forces and had been asked to oversee the modifications and enhancements of the Xesh-5 facility to a suitable military garrison.

Since he was on-duty and worse, on Iosan, Hel ensured he wouldn’t have to breathe any of the toxins by wearing his own armor. Crimson in color, his regalia bore a resemblance to the armor worn by the Iron Legion and its special forces divisions– but with several important differences. On his right side, a crimson black WESTAR-35 blaster pistol was holstered firmly to his hip and an elegant and devastating looking sword, reminiscent of the Sith sheathed across his back.

As the ramp opened and the occupants of the *Sentinel*-class shuttle departed with a hover-cart carrying a few pallets, the Commander’s crimson-helmeted head looked up from the datapad to the two uniformed pilots.

“Cargo?” he queried in a firm manner.

The one on the right extended a small datapad showing the shipping manifest, while the left cracked open one of the boxes on the cart to reveal the contents. Inside, were clear cases containing dozens of breath masks and replacement filters. The miniature computer TK-246 had been handed confirmed the same. He nodded, and gave the datapad back to its owner before looking back at his own for a moment to mark the shipment as arrived.

"Right, we've been waiting for these," Hel started, as he pointed to the entrance to the rest of the facility. "Go through that door and take a right. Follow the corridor until the end of the hallway, and bring them into the mess. Contact Operations, let them know the masks are here so we can distribute them." The men nodded, gave a small salute and proceeded off with the hover-cart towed between them.

His attention was only turned back to the datapad in his hands for a split moment before the feeling washed over him again. This time he was certain, *he was being watched*. Choosing a different tactic, the former Stormtrooper did not jerk or react, instead going about his business on the datapad for nearly a minute more before turning and proceeding out of the hangar bay. The feeling continued. Taking a left instead of the right he had provided to the cargo pilots, the Kiffar-Mirialan half-breed transferred himself into one of the auxiliary corridors alone.

Still, the feeling he was being watched had not subsided. TK-246 launched his trap; turning around one of the corners sharply, he quickly twisted his body around and waited three heartbeats. Just as the major blood-muscle in his chest pounded the third time, the Commander launched himself at the corner with his arms and hands forward. Between luck, or pure skill, he grabbed the collars of a figure that crept around the corner as he pounced and pushed forward with whatever strength his armored legs could muster.

The small and lithe frame of a cloaked woman was lifted from the floor and thrust backwards into the wall, hood falling from her head and uncovering the features of her face. Fiery eyes that matched his own pierced through TK-246's modified helmet, the smooth and pale reflection of her well structured face lighting up. She was instantly recognizable - even though the hair was not as he remembered it.

FN-1705's dirty blonde hair had been cut short enough that it barely touched her ears. The face of Hel's sister had acquired a scar down her right cheek since he last saw her. Rage washed over him, his mind racing as he quickly drew several conclusions. He asked anyways.

"What are *you* doing here?" the Taldryan hissed as he squeezed the smaller figure a little at the shoulders, knowing full well she could never see the folly in the First Order and move on from them. FN-1705 cringed and turned away for a moment at the extra pressure that held her off the ground and against the wall.

"The answer is simple," her voice was almost a whisper, "You know as well as I do that no one walks away from the First Order. Especially someone like you. Times are *changing*. Snoke is dead, and

Kylo Ren is our Supreme Leader now. I was sent here..." FN-1705 trailed off, turning her head to face her flesh and blood.

In a blur, the woman flipped a short black vibrodagger off her belt and into her right hand, compressing the activation switch as she thrust her arm forward and shoved the blade between the crimson red plating of TK-246's armor into his abdomen.

"... To kill you," she smiled. Behind his helmet, Hel's eyes went wide as the strength in his arms faded and his sister slid down the wall. Removing his left hand from the shoulder of the familial assassin, he grasped the knife by the handle and de-activated the switch before pulling it clean out and dropping it to the floor. He didn't move as he struggled to fight the pain that embroiled his belly. Blood began to wet the armor's black bodyglove.

"So whaddya say?" she mused as she slipped out from the grip of his other hand behind him, taking the knife back in her hand. "Are you going to go down easy?"

Without a word, the crimson form twisted and brought an arm up, using his right hand to grasp the First Order agent by the face. Terror and surprise flooded FN-1705's face as again she was forced back, but with no restraint on the part of her brother. As the back of her head pounded against the wall, her eyesight became slightly fuzzy as her brain concussed. She reached out with her own arm, but was grabbed at the wrist.

Removing his gloved hand from her face, TK-246's helmeted head leaned in. The tension was volcanic in its intensity. At this point, real fear had taken hold of the younger half-breed as she stared into the onyx eye-sockets of the helmet.

"**No**," he cursed, throwing his sister as hard as he could by the arm into the middle of the hallway with a grunt. His wound continued to bleed slowly, starting to drip down the leg-plating of his armor. The First Order agent stumbled forward forward and turned to face him, WESTAR-35 already pointed at her head from several feet away.

"Oh please, you won't kill me," she scoffed, putting both hands on her hips.

"You're right," the Taldryan stated without emotion, beginning to lower his pistol. A smile cracked FN-1705's lips, as she muttered under her breath. "But you would have."

"I would have," the older of the two nodded, snapping his pistol halfway up and shooting a bolt of red superheated plasma into his sister's leg. Pure agony erupted with her lips as the bolt tore through her clothing and fried a score of flesh and muscle in her knee, dropping her to the ground.

"Why?!" FN-1705 shrieked, both hands gripping her knee as she laid on the side. She couldn't stop tears from streaming from her eyes, vision beginning to blur. TK-246 holstered his weapon, moving over to the fallen target and grabbing the collar on the hood of her cloak.

Without care for her injuries, he tightened his grip and kept walking; beginning to drag the injured Stormtrooper behind him down the hall. His abdomen strained and his gut filled with pain, but he carried on. He could seek medical attention soon, and judging by the amount of blood there were no major arteries hit.

"Are you serious!?" he raised his free hand, looking down at her, "You tried to kill me! What's even worse, *you failed pathetically!* They'll court martial you, and then kill you too!" Hel never failed to continue stop moving, dragging FN-1705 directly to the newly commissioned brig where she could rot and think about her lack of strength and perseverance.