

Standing aboard the bridge of the MC-80 Cruiser *Paragon* Justinios Drake found himself in one of his least favorite positions, that of sole decision maker. Starships belonging to the Caelus Security Forces now blockaded the powerful Taldryan armada as it orbited around the moon of Chyron. On the planet below, Consul Rian Taldrya had been taken prisoner by the son of the former chancellor. Drayen Ky'Lian, according to his sister, was also now obsessed with and possibly possessed by the spirit of a dead Sith Lord.

Justinios was the only senior member of the Taldryan command staff still with the fleet. SRI agents were able to send a quick burst message through the CSF jamming but all it contained was the information that Rian was captured, who his captor was and where they had holed up. The summits of both House Ektrosis and Archanis had been moonside when the coup occurred. No doubt, they were marshalling whatever forces they could to rescue Rian. But Justinios knew that any assault on Drayen's residence at 200 Stellaris would cause massive casualties on both sides.

"Sir," Captain Yuma Kilron said interrupting the Aleena's thoughts, "we need you to make the call."

Decisions like these were no what Justinios had ever intended to get involved in when he left Coruscant in search of the Library of Leers over two years ago. His pursuit was scholarly and all he wanted to do was return to those days. Instead Justinios found himself making life and death decisions while the captain of a battle cruiser awaited his command. *His* command. A being who was grading term papers only a few years ago. But now he was a Taldrya, a son of the clan, and that now made him the highest ranking person left in contact with the fleet.

"Only five minutes left in our orbital window, sir." A junior officer from the gunnery crew called out the remaining time as he had been doing in five minute intervals for the last half hour.

Justinios was getting better with remembering his naval procedures and was aware that this officer would start calling out the minutes now and then the last sixty seconds as they passed. The Aleena knew what needed to be done but hated that he had to make the call. Hopefully, the rest of the clan would know he didn't do this as a power grab. If he had to, he would even take a leave away from the entire unit if that is what it took to prove to the rest of the Taldrya that he had gone power hungry with his new title.

*After this, some time away might do me good anyways.*

"Four minutes."

The Aleena knew the time had come. There was only one way to neutralize Drayen and minimize casualties on both sides. Rian had to understand. The Consul had put so much effort into building the Caelus system into a new home for Clan Taldryan and if the clan's military engaged in a blood battle in the streets of Chyron the citizenry would never accept them as the

new overlords of the system. The life of one person could not stand in the way of the Clan's progress, no matter how important they were.

"Take the shot," Justinios commanded.

It was one blast from a single turbolaser, a precision strike. Nobody aboard the *Paragon* felt anything and from this distance nobody on the bridge saw the bolt strike nor the resulting destruction. But Justinios knew what he had ordered and found himself truly sad for the order he was forced to give.

"Comms are already back up, we are being inundated." Justinios watched as the comms officer flipped switches and attempted to route the now deluge of traffic.

"Prioritize any communications for Jiq Morvit or Ceyra Ky'Lian..."

Justinios was immediately interrupted by the comms officer. "I have a message from Ms. Ky'Lian. It reads 'I have taken back control of the CDF, we are standing down'."

The plan had worked, but the cost was high. One single turbolaser blast took out the entire building of 200 Stellaris, with Rian inside. But, it also took out Drayen and almost all of his personal guard who had fortified the building against the Taldryan assault he was expecting. Without the threat of Drayen and his newfound powers, Cerya and Jiq were easily able to convince the rest of the CDF to stand down.

*All it cost was one of our own. Justinios thought to himself. But the system is ours now Rian, I wish you were here to see it.*