

Sleeping With the Fishes

A Submission to the Competition:
Into the Fire – Long Fiction
Mission Choice 1 - Manhunt



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37 ABY

Caelestis City, Ragnath

Orion Gale scanned the faces in the marketplace. It was emptier than usual, thanks to the attack on Adoniram Tower and the Colossus Statue of Emperor Palpatine and the foiled attempt on the military academy. The citizens, for the most part, didn't want to risk getting caught up in something like that. Still, some were out and about, but there were fewer people than there would have been at any other time. However, none of them matched the target he had been assigned to capture. He knew it would be a long shot; reports had indicated that the target was last spotted in north-west Maqor, the territory that Scholae Palatinae had most recently assumed control over. He had wanted to check things out for himself anyway, though, and now his curiosity was satisfied.

Thanks to members of Imperial Scholae Intelligence, and possibly the Meraxis agents that had been captured before, the means in which the Meraxis agents had been able to gain access to the Tower had been revealed. The traitor responsible was a man named David Indur, a member of the Imperial Scholae Army that had recently transferred into Intelligence after trying to get a spot there for months. Presumably, he had used his security clearance to access sensitive information before making a copy of it and sending it off to a contact within the Meraxis Empire. Now it was the Kiffar's job to track him down.

To accomplish this goal, Orion needed to take a quick detour first. From the marketplace, he made he traveled to the address that was on file for Indur. His hope was to get some kind of clue or insight as to the man's plan, where he was heading. He arrived at the apartment complex and spoke to the building manager, who agreed to let him inside the apartment after Orion had explained the situation to him.

Orion stepped into the apartment and looked around. It was small, but had enough room to live in comfortably. A doorway that led to a refresher was off to the left, just a few meters away from the entrance. Beyond that was another door that likely led to the bedroom. Off to the right was a small kitchen and dining area and, past that, a living room. What struck Orion the most was that this didn't seem like the home of someone that served in the armed forces. The entire place was a mess, with papers scattered across a coffee table. A quick glance into the bedroom revealed a similarly chaotic scene. Given the state of things, it seemed unlikely that someone else had been there and tossed the place looking for clues — there were no drawers pulled out and dumped, no furniture turned upside down, or anything else that would indicate a search of some kind. This guy was just a slob.

The bounty hunter stepped into the bedroom. A quick check of the closet and dresser revealed that most of Indur's clothes appeared to be left behind. There was even a suitcase tucked into the back corner of the closet. It was strange, almost like he had left in a hurry. Perhaps he hadn't been expecting to leave when he did. Orion supposed that it was possible his contact within the Meraxis Empire never informed him of when exactly they would be attacking, thus catching him by surprise and triggering the quick and unprepared

getaway. But the details were of little importance, at least for the moment. What required his attention now was gathering any clues he could find as to his current whereabouts.

Orion spotted a datapad on the man's desk. He walked over and checked to see if he could access it — but it was locked. Instead, he laid a hand on it and concentrated. A sound that was like a mixture of rushing water and blowing wind filled his mind. The outside world dissolved away, slowly changing as he was pulled into the memory of the device.

David Indur was sitting at his desk, eyes focused on the datapad. There was a small device attached to it; likely something used for data storage. Orion's attention honed in on the datapad itself, wanting to know more. The screen held images of building plans and Indur was swiping through them, like he was making sure he hadn't missed anything.

That must be how he smuggled the information out from his job with Intelligence, Orion thought to himself.

The scene changed as the memory progressed. This one seemed to be more recent. Indur came rushing into the room and picked up the datapad, angrily swiping at it, his eyes filled with panic. He was clearly worried about something.

"It wasn't supposed to happen this way," Indur thought aloud. "Well, of course it was supposed to happen, but they said that they'd tell me when the attack would happen so that I wouldn't get caught up in any of this. But no, they didn't tell me anything. So instead, I had to sneak away from work when everyone is trying to figure out what happened."

Once again, Orion focused his attention on the datapad. There was a message on the screen. The sender's name was missing and there was an indication that it was encrypted. The details mentioned a meeting place, a fishing village located somewhere along the coastline of north-west Maqor. It must have been from Indur's contact within the Meraxis Empire sharing an extraction plan with him. Taking another look at the datapad, the name of the village was Kima. Satisfied, he let the memory go, the scene dissolving around him as he was brought back to the present.

The Kiffar pulled out his own datapad and, through a secure connection to Imperial Scholae Intelligence, accessed the files on locations within Scholae Palatinae's control. He scrolled through until he found the listing for Kima and opened it. The details were minimal, but it seemed to be a simple enough village. It was larger than Orion had initially thought and it had a decent level of technology, so at least it wouldn't feel like he was out in the middle of nowhere when he arrived, despite its location being far from the capital. With no time to waste, Orion quickly made his way back outside and hopped onto his speeder, heading for Kima Village.

Kima Village, Maqor Ragnath

Grexx Inaris stood at the food stand, wondering what he should order. He read over the menu and settled on some fried fish thing. He figured that when the source was so close by, it must be good. He paid the owner and turned away, ready to take a bite of his meal until —

Someone bumped into him, causing him to lose his grip and drop his newly acquired food onto the ground.

The Lasat glared at the offender. It was some Human, oblivious to everything around him. The man attempted to push past him, but Grexx grabbed him by the collar and lifting him into the air.

“Oh, no you don’t, bub,” he said with a low growl.

“H-Hey, let me go! I’ve got somewhere to be!” the man said, squirming to get free.

“You see that on the ground there? That’s my lunch. You made me drop it. What do you have to say about that?”

“I don’t care. Just let me go, man!”

“Not good enough, sorry. How about you buy me a new one and we call it even?”

* * * *

Orion slowed his speeder to a stop as he entered the village. He wasn’t sure where to go next, but he had an image of Indur that he could show people as he went through the village. The Kiffar looked around and spotted a place to park his speeder among others and walked it over. As he did so, he heard a commotion off in the distance. Whether it was just passing curiosity or instinct, something told him to check out, so he did.

When the bounty hunter arrived at the epicenter, he spotted a large, purple-furred alien holding a man just off the ground. Most people tried to ignore what was going on as they went about their day, but others stopped to watch. As he drew nearer, he paused to talk to one of the on-lookers.

“Hey. This looks kinda interesting. What’s going on here?”

“Well, the little guy was running through to get somewhere when he bumped into the big guy. Made him drop his food. Now the big guy wants him to pay for a replacement. The shorter one wouldn’t even apologize, let alone agree to buy him the food.”

“Yeah, I’d be upset too. I mean, it’s just rude to bump into people like that, but when you make them drop food, it seems only right to say sorry, at the very least.”

Orion was about to say more until he caught a better look at the man. He looked strangely familiar. After a quick check of his datapad, he realized that he had inadvertently stumbled upon his target: David Indur. He couldn’t help but smile to himself as he walked over.

“Excuse me,” he began. “Are you David Indur?”

The man looked suspicious at first but then nodded vigorously. “Yes, yes I am! Can you please tell this...thing to let go of me? We really should be going now.”

“Yeah, sure thing.” Orion shifted his gaze upward to the towering alien. “Listen, I’m sorry for causing trouble, but you know, this guy you got here, he and I are supposed to go somewhere now.”

“What? I don’t think so. He still owes me lunch after what he did.”

“How about I pay you for the meal, with a little extra for your trouble, and we call it even?”

“Yeah, I guess that could work.”

Orion handed over a fistful of credits and the alien and thanked him. He released his hold on Indur, who let out a sigh of relief and began to thank Orion profusely. The bounty hunter waved it off. He remembered seeing a pier in the distance and brought Indur with him as he headed towards it. The tide was out at the moment, so he was able to walk beneath it for some more privacy. Once they were sure nobody would be bothering them, Indur spoke up first.

“Thank you so much! I thought that guy was going to kill me!”

“Of course, it’s no trouble,” Orion replied with a smile.

“So, what’s the plan? How are we going to get out of here?”

“Me? I’m going leave the same way I came here — on my speeder. You, on the other hand...you’re, well, not leaving.”

Indur blinked in confusion. “Wait, what? No, no, no. That wasn’t the deal! I was supposed to come here and get pic—”

"The deal's off," Orion said, pulling out one of his blasters and leveling it at Indur. "Or, more accurately, I'm not the one you made the deal with in the first place. You see, I was sent here to collect you, but not by the people you think."

Indur turned white as a sheet at that. "Oh...oh no. Please, you have to let me go!"

"Sorry, pal. No can do. I was sent by Scholae Palatinae. They know who you are and what you did. It's over."

"What if I pay you? That works, huh? Just let me go, okay? They'll never need to know. Just say you couldn't find me!"

"See, I told them I'd find you, and I like keeping my word. And when I take on a job, I like seeing it through to the end. Besides, they wouldn't have tasked me to this if they didn't think I could do it. Now, what did you leak to your contact within the Meraxis Empire?"

"I can't tell you that. They'll kill me!"

"In case you couldn't tell, you're probably gonna wind up dead either way. Either they kill you because you're burned and they have no more use for you...or I do it. At least with me, I can promise to make it quick and painless." Orion pressed the barrel of his blaster underneath the man's chin. "Now, talk."

"Okay, okay!" Indur gulped loudly. "Look, all I gave them were the building plans to Adoniram Tower and pointed out flaws in the security system, how to bypass it, that kind of thing."

"What else?" the bounty hunter nudged the barrel up higher.

"Just that and weaknesses in the fleet. That's all, I swear!"

"Thank you for your assistance. I appreciate it, truly."

"Please, just let me go now!"

"Oh, you're free to go," Orion said, turning around and beginning to walk away.

"Thank you so mu—" the man's sentence was cut short as Orion spun around and fired a single shot. The man's head snapped back and his body crumpled to the ground, dead.

"Free to go to hell, that is," the Kiffar said, spitting onto the sand at his feet. "There's a special place in hell for traitors and people like you who facilitate the deaths of people like what you did."

Orion holstered his blaster and pushed the lifeless corpse out into the water. He gave the body one last look of contempt before heading back towards the marketplace. He pulled out his comlink and contacted Scholae Palatinae.

"Orion Gale reporting in," he spoke into the device.

"This is command. Go ahead," a voice replied.

"The target has been neutralized. I'll be sending you information on what I learned momentarily."

"Thank you for your service, Gale. The Empire appreciates it."

"Yeah, sure. Just make sure you get these guys, okay?"

"Of course. Stand by for further orders," the voice said before the connection was severed.

Orion really felt like grabbing a drink after the day he'd just had, not to mention as a celebration of a job well done, but figured it might be a little early. Instead, he decided to get some lunch, maybe try that food stand the alien was at earlier. He was surprised to notice the alien's large form still there when he arrived. They greeted each other before Orion went to place his order.

"You know, I'm a little curious, and there's no real good way to put it, but what are you exactly?" Orion asked, leaning against the side of the food stand.

The big guy scoffed. "I'm a Lasat. Name's Grex. Grex Inaris."

"Lasat, huh? Never seen one before until now, but I've heard some stories."

"I'm sure you have. Say, what did you want with that guy anyway?"

"Oh, that. I was sent by Scholae Palatinae. He worked for them and they needed to know something about the attack on their capital city recently. They wanted me to, uhh...take care of him..." Orion trailed off at the end.

"Oh, I see. It's too bad that happened," Grex said. If he caught the implied meaning behind what Orion said, coupled with the fact that the man was no longer with him, he did a good job at hiding it. "Scholar Palpatine?" Grex asked. "That name sounds familiar. I think I know someone there. His name's Reiden. First met him when he was a bit of a runt. Does good work himself."

"You don't say? He's actually the one that dragged me into all of this a few years ago. Keeps me in business and ensures I always have some drinking money and excitement."

"Small world, isn't it?" Grex said with a grin.

"Yeah, it really is. Why don't you stick around for a while longer? I'm sure Reiden would enjoy seeing an old friend again once things have calmed down a bit."

"You know, I just might do that. It'd be good to see him again. Don't always get some vacation time myself, so I may as well make the most of it."

Orion simply nodded and began to eat his food. It was good, but not as good as a nice drink would feel. Then again, he knew he should probably keep his senses sharp in the coming days. There was no telling what might happen now that the Meraxis Empire was on the offensive. The bounty hunter knew one thing for sure, though: as long as the credits kept coming in, he was happy to stick around and help out to the best of his ability.