**Prologue**

**The Aedile’s Quarters**

**Chyron**

Aldaric sat in his usual spot in his makeshift library reading the latest of the many Ancient Sith scrolls that he had collected. It was as dull as the last had been. It was another document that droned on about the strength and power of a long-dead Sith Lord. It wasn’t glamorous work, but there were almost always tiny details to be gleaned from them. He would come across whispers of some ancient powerful artifact here, or some long forgotten ability. The average person would dismiss these as rampant boasts and fabrications, but Aldaric knew better. Some details may, in fact, be exaggerated, but there was always an underlying truth. He sighed and reached for the bottle of Corellian whiskey that sat on the table and poured himself another generous portion of the amber colored liquid. As he sat back and took a drink from the glass, his thoughts drifted back to the world of Kalus. That was, in fact, why he was here. Lord Andrelious had promised him access to the system that was once controlled by Clan Taldrya. He knew that the Warlord had been stretching the truth. The clan had long since lost control of the system. However, with the kind of military that House Archanis had been assembling, a return was inevitable. You’ll get your chance he thought to himself.

 He was asleep in the same spot when the call came in, and after quickly composing himself he answered it. The image of Andrelious appeared before him.

“I trust you aren’t hungover this time,” Andrelious said sardonically. “Something important has developed.”

“You have my attention,” replied Aldaric. “What is going on?”

“We can’t discuss it like this. Meet me at the usual spot. You never know who could be listening.”

A wry smile spread across the face of the Chiss, “I’m on my way.”

He promptly ended the call and sprung to his feet. The Aedile wondered what his Quaestor was so spooked about, but knew these scenarios always led to something interesting.

**New Spanky’s Tavern**

**Taldryan Sector**

**Chyron**

 The tavern was as lively as ever, even at this late hour. The patrons talked loudly amongst themselves and the token band made up of three Bith filled the air with their usual garish music. Aldaric walked to a darkened corner and found that his usual table was unoccupied. He took his seat and briefly surveyed the room. “Nobody I recognize,” he thought to himself. He then closed his eyes and reached out, and with his mind, searched the room for anything of note. Thankfully, he didn’t sense any other Force-sensitive individuals, and no one seemed to be paying any attention to him. Most of the patrons had already drunk themselves into oblivion and hadn’t even noticed his entry. One human at the Sabacc table was in a rage over losing a substantial sum to his droid opponent. The female at his side was directing the same emotion towards the ill-fated gambler. “Tough night pal,” Aldaric mumbled to himself. The service droid noticed Aldaric and came to the table.

“What can I get for you, sir?” It asked in its usual annoying and melodic voice.

“I’ll have my usual. Corellian whiskey, neat.”

“Very well sir,” the droid replied.

It was a short wait before the droid returned with his drink. Aldaric took a light sip and sat back as that typical warm feeling spread throughout his chest. Just then Andrelious entered the room. He walked swiftly over and took the seat across from the Chiss.

“How is it?” asked the Quaestor.

“It’s clear,” Aldaric replied with a slight grin. “Though, I hope that guy at the Sabacc table has a comfortable couch to sleep on.”

Andrelious glanced over out of the corner of his eye and shuddered. “I feel your pain man.”

Aldaric chuckled, “Trouble at the Mimosa-Inaj homestead?”

“Never mind that,” came the swift reply. “I have a mission for you.”

Aldaric’s eyebrow shot up immediately. “Do tell.”

“Rian has ordered the Houses to assemble and assault the old Taldryan stronghold on Kalus. Our intelligence operatives have spotted a Collective reclamation team there that is attempting to extract the Orb of Pomojema. It looks like you’ll get your chance to visit the Rybanloth system.”

Aldaric sat back in his chair. “The Orb of Pomojema,” he said. “A massive orange sphere with a smaller blue sphere visible in the center. Quite the powerful artifact. I hear it can suck the Force out of a Jedi.”

“So, you’ve heard of it?”

“Of course, a wise tactician knows the weapons of his friends as well as those of his enemies. So why the cloak and dagger meeting?”

“I am sending you with our drop team squads to recover it yourself. That Orb once belonged to House Ektrosis, and they will no doubt want their chance to study it first it again if we take it together. With the Collective already on Kalus, it is only a matter of time before they locate the Orb and move it out of the stronghold. We can’t let that happen. I’m leading the rest of our forces together with the clan to secure it tomorrow, I want you to leave tonight to be sure it is still there when we get there.”

“Very well Lord Andrelious,” Aldaric replied clearly excited. “I will prepare immediately.”

**The Valley**

**Kalus**

 The trip to Kalus had been a busy one. Aldaric had quickly gathered the old plans for the stronghold as well as some old geologic surveys of the area and spent the trip studying them. The intelligence report showed that the main entrance was well fortified and easily defended with only a few men, but given the vast cave network in the area, there must be a second way in. One cave, in particular, showed promise. It began in a small valet between two mountains about two kilometers from the stronghold and ran nearly straight to its location. It was an ideal location, most likely intended as a clandestine escape route. They came in low to keep out of sight of the stronghold and landed near the cave entrance.

 To Aldaric, Kalus was a beautiful world. It reminded him of a rustic version of his homeworld of Csilla. The ice-covered mountains towered above the valley. It terminated at the foot of a third impenetrable wall of ice, with a small cave opening in the side of it. The only thing the scene was lacking was the deep blue color of the ice that was caused by the particular minerals that Csilla’s water contained. The same minerals that gave the Chiss their signature skin tone.

 He strode over to the Lieutenant that led the strike team. He was a young human in his early twenties. He was taller than Aldaric and much more heavily built. As Aldaric walked up to him he stood at attention.

“How are you finding the weather Lieutenant Harvas?” he asked with a grin.

“Frakking cold, but nothing we can’t handle,” the Lieutenant replied confidently. “You seem to be enjoying it.”

“Feels just like home actually. Is the squad ready?” asked the Aedile.

“We are sir. We await your order to proceed.”

“Then you have it, Lieutenant, lets gets this done.”

 Aldaric then turned and headed into the cave with the troops following close behind. The cave was dark and foreboding. The initial few hundred meters were lined with large stalactites coated in ice, but the air quickly warmed as they traveled deeper underground. They proceeded down at a slow pace, and after a half an hour they reached a door blocking the path.

“Would you like us to plant charges on that door sir?” asked the Lieutenant.

“That would spoil the surprise. I can handle this,” Aldaric replied as he pulled his lightsaber from his belt. “Be ready.”

He ignited the crimson blade of his lightsaber. The cave was brightly illuminated by the blade and the hum was irritatingly loud, amplified by the small space. He plunged the blade into the locking mechanism of the door. The door glowed brightly and began to melt immediately. After only thirty seconds or so he shut off his weapon and carefully pushed the door open. The chamber ahead was pitch black. In the dim light of the squad’s lights, Aldaric could barely make out tables scattered around the area.

“Excellent, we are in the cafeteria. The area where the orb was kept is down the left hall in the far corner of the stronghold. We will proceed as quietly as possible,” Aldaric whispered.

Lieutenant Harvas replied with only a curt nod. It didn’t take them long before they found the entrance. The Collective could be heard working inside noisily. “This will be easy,” Aldaric thought to himself. “They are too focused on their work. He turned to the Lieutenant and whispered.

“I’m going in. The second I ignite my blade, send in your squad behind me to clear the room.”

“Yes, sir.” He replied as he motioned to the squad.

Aldaric gripped his lightsaber lightly, and with a final deep breath, he sprinted into the room. He barely had time to take in the scene. The massive orb sat in the center already mostly disassembled and loaded in a stack of crates near the opposite door. A dozen men were spread around the room. One was close by lowering the orb into a crate. Aldaric ignited his blade and angled towards his unfortunate victim. Just as his blade cleanly cleaved the soldier in two the room was filled with a hair of blaster bolts. Aldaric rushed the soldiers at the opposite door and leaped over a fallen soldier. He swiftly cut down the one on the left just as a blaster bolt struck the right soldier’s head. They crumpled to the ground simultaneously. Just then a dozen blaster bolts erupted from the corridor. Aldaric barely leaped to the side to avoid them. Unfortunately, Aldaric’s squad was already fanned out in the room and made short work of the last of the Collective troops in the hall.

“Lieutenant have half of your men secure the Orb,” Aldaric shouted. “Bring the rest and we will sweep this place clean.”

They made their way to the entrance quickly, they only encountered a handful of Collective on the way that had been returning from loading the crates onto their ship. Fortunately, they hadn’t heard the noise from the battle and were blissfully unaware of the conflict until they walked around a corner into Aldaric’s awaiting blade. Outside the stronghold the visibility was poor. A snowstorm had hit while they were in the base. The Collective’s freighter was sitting in the open guarded by the last of the raiding team. They dove into cover as they opened fire on the intruders. Lieutenant Harvas’ team pinned them down with blaster fire as the Chiss leaped over the edge of the stairway and circled around them. He cut the first man’s head off cleanly and ran to the next. As the others saw their comrade fall, they stood up in surprise and took aim at Aldaric. Before they could fire, they were quickly dispatched by the Taldryan troops. With that, the battle was over.

**Epilogue**

**Kalus – The next day**

 Aldaric was sitting quietly next to the Orb enjoying the whiskey he had brought along with him when Andrelious approached him. The troops that had been playing a game of Sabacc quickly stood at attention.

“Care for a drink?” He asked the Warlord as he rose to his feet.

“No thanks,” Andrelious replied with a smile. “I see the collective didn’t give you much trouble. Nihlus was quite unhappy when we landed only to find a handful of snow-covered corpses outside.” He laughed out loud. “He was even more unhappy when he was told we would get the chance to study it first. I assume you’d like to have some time with it?”

“And the Force nexus? I want to take some time to study that as well.” The Aedile replied with a wink.

“I suppose you have earned it. Just make sure you are back on Chyron as soon as possible.”

With that, Aldaric gathered his things and threw back the last of the whiskey. “See you there he replied and walked towards the entrance.

**THE END**