

An Officer and a Traitor

-Part II of the *Conductor Duology*-
Objective 1 - Vodo Biask Taldrya 3729

Vodo Biask Taldrya panted raggedly. His heart thudded in his chest as his shoulder heaved with his labored breaths. He wasn't getting any younger and a good number of troopers had burst from the ship. Before him lay the two halves of a Rodian wearing the uniform of the Severan Principate. Scattered throughout the hangar bay of the *Resurgent* were the corpses of the rest of the boarding party, probably thirty in all. Behind him sat the Clan Consul, Rian Taldrya, propped against the bulkhead wall as he cupped his belly with a hand. He was gasping for air between shudders of pain.

Taking one last look around the landing bay, Vodo reached out with the Force and determined that the threat was over. His thumb released the pressure plate on his unique lightsaber hilt and the white-red blade slid back into it with a snap-hiss. Ship's Security fanned throughout the space, their short barreled weapons sweeping back and forth as they cleared corners and obstructions, confirming that the last of the Principate's assault force had truly been neutralized. He turned on his heel and strode to the Consul, kneeling before him and inspecting the wound.

A trickle of blood dotted the corner of Rian's jawline, a brilliant crimson streak on a face that was growing more pale, "I-- I didn't realize you were a healer, Biask."

Vodo's eyes, yellow flecked with red in the way of the Sith, grew harder than even that of his usual glaring. The Force recoiled from his touch, as it normally did, but he grabbed at it and wrenched it to his purpose. He felt its oily tendrils snaking under his hands as they searched out and found the Consul's wound. Like striking stingers the Force dove into the wound and accelerated its healing. The technique was rough, drawing energy from the host to patch the body up. The Warlord stopped after a minute seeing that Rian had passed out. It would suffice for now, the internal bleeding had stopped and the skin was less blackened and more angry red.

He stood and examined the hangar again. What had just happened here?

Andan Taldrya Marshal reclined comfortably on the couch of the opulent shuttle's main cabin. The *Karuf Knight* was Vodo's ship but Andan seemed perfectly at home. He playfully

drew on a cigar and exhaled it luxuriantly, taking it out to examine it more closely before replacing it between his grinning teeth.

“Alderanean you say?” Andan always appreciated Vodo’s hospitality.

Vodo drummed the fingers of his right hand against his wood desk. “That cigar is the most important thing in your world right now?”

“But it’s Alderanean,” he said as though that explained everything else away. “How do you even get your hands on this sort of thing?”

“Auction,” Vodo sniped.

“You’ll have to bring me to one of these events sometime,” Andan winked at Vodo.

“Indeed. In other news, the Consul nearly died this morning or did you forget what I invited you here to discuss?” The Twi’lek stood from his chair so as to loom more effectively.

“I didn’t forget,” Andan grew serious too, almost mockingly so. “I was under the impression the Principate had a ceasefire agreement with the Brotherhood. Did something change?”

“According to the Proconsul there’s been no change in the Rules of Engagement,” Vodo sat again, composing himself.

Andan’s shoulders jumped as he laughed under his breath. “Apparently they have—for them...”

“No, according to all sources the Principate is still maintaining the agreement. No orders have been rescinded. It seems our attackers were mutineers, disobeying orders to strike back at their perceived enemies I suspect,” Vodo looked around and located the tumbler of amber liquid to his right and took a small sip.

“Mutineers in an Imperial remnant force? These are the people we want to get into bed with?” Andan couldn’t believe the heirs of the Empire had fallen to such a degree. “Wait, wasn’t there supposed to be a diplomat or something aboard that ship?”

Wearying of Andan’s feigned ignorance, Vodo answered, “yes. Rear Admiral Greyson’s representative was supposed to be here to discuss the information Lt. Hanshu delivered to him: The Dossier containing all the proof of Rhyllance’s treason.”

“Was he among the Mutineers?”

Vodo shook his head dislodging one of his lekku from its perch on his shoulder and it slid down to hang beside his arm. "No. There was no evidence of him aboard the ship."

"You don't think he sent them, do you?" Andan stubbed the remaining inch of the cigar into a small crystal dish, extinguishing it.

"I didn't meet with him for very long on the moon below us but I didn't get that sort of read from him. He's not the type to make his own decisions, probably why he gravitated into the orbit of a flag officer," Vodo placed the Lekku on his opposite shoulder, wrapping its length comfortably under his strong chin. "They weren't here by accident as they came at the scheduled time expecting to meet the Consul and I."

Vodo leaned back in his plush chair. "I believe this was the Admiral's doing."

Andan looked at him dubiously. "To what end? Is he in league with Rhyllance too? You think Rhyllance is playing the Collective against the Principate to keep the Brotherhood weak and that he now has a Severan Rear Admiral in his pocket too so he can work both angles? I don't know... That's a tough sell."

"I *know* for a fact Rhyllance is the root cause of this entire situation," Vodo corrected Andan, "and Greyson doesn't have to be working for him in order to try and have us killed. He probably has no love for the Brotherhood and all the Dossier did was tell him where he could find a new ally."

"I'd buy that. It would explain why with all the developments announced since you handed Lt. Hanshu back why we haven't heard anything about Rhyllance's plot," The other Warlord responded with a satisfied look on his face.

Vodo nodded in agreement. He was growing frustrated. He'd been given the Dossier by his reliable Cipher Agent Richard Hehd just before the events here in the Lyra-system had kicked off. He had been unable to get the information through to the Dark Council as they scrambled to deal with the Deputy Grandmaster's captivity and the growing threat of war with the Principate as news of the Collective's staged attack came to the fore. He and Rian had decided that if the news was to have any impact in time to prevent open hostilities it needed to be delivered to Grandmaster directly. Lord Cantor had headed to the Lyra System and so Vodo had followed intending to intercept the Grandmaster but he'd been drawn into a dogfight instead with a pair of patrolling starfighters. When the *Resurgent* showed up on the scene, rescuing Vodo and his Apprentice by all rights, they managed to capture one of the two Severan pilots and convince him of the true cause of the attacks on his people. He'd been sent back to his Rear Admiral, a commanding officer of one of the Fifth Fleet's task forces, to get the contents of the Dossier into the hands of the Severan Principate.

The Grandmaster continued to be busy and seemed disinterested in meeting with Vodo. Rian had tried on several occasions over the last few days since the Dossier had been sent to the Principate to arrange for a similar hand off to the Dark Council but it had all come to nothing. Clan Taldryan was no longer on the Justicar's list of undesirables but the relationship between the Iron Throne and the Clan was still lackluster and distrustful. They'd instead turned to the Rear Admiral in hopes that the information would convince him and that he would push it on his end, which had been the reason a shuttle supposedly bearing his name had come to meet with them. That it had borne assault troops and not a diplomat had been a surprise, to be sure.

As if making up his mind Vodo called up a program to contact the Severan Pilot he'd captured and released, Lt. Goreg Hanshu. Andan watched with interest but it became apparent after a minute that the line would not be picked up. Vodo nodded to himself knowingly. He had a feeling that Goreg Hanshu would not be picking up that line now or at anytime in the future. If he wasn't imprisoned he was likely dead. Had he even made it back to his fleet after that brief fight on the Thillon Moon or had Captain To'phir Al'abara, Greyson's attache, dropped him out the airlock after procuring the Dossier?

"I need to have a talk with the Rear Admiral," Vodo told Andan plainly.

A soft chime announced an incoming transmission. Vodo's brow furrowed as he saw the name on his terminal screen. "What in the nine Corellian hells?"

"Who is it?"

Pressing a few buttons Vodo answered the call and the form of Atra Ventus, the Regent of Arx Capital Enterprises, appeared in lifesize scale from the ship's embedded holo-emitter. "Greetings, Biask."

"Your Excellency, this is a surprise," Vodo answered coolly, already disliking the man's apparent lack of etiquette. "How can I assist you?"

The Umbaran's lined face smiled faintly as he chose his words, "I believe, rather, it's how I can help you."

"I'm not following, Master Ventus," Vodo leaned forward, curious as to what the Regent was getting at.

Atra folded his hands behind his back and clasped them there, "I know where Rhyllance will be."

"Wait, what?" Andan stood up and approached the hologram. "How do you know that? How do you know we're interested?"

"ARX sells 92% of all communicators used by the Brotherhood." The Umbaran's smile had a knowing quality about it which Vodo interpreted to mean that ARX had the ability to monitor communications over those devices, a fact that reminded Vodo of the Inquisitorius ComLink sitting on his bedside table.

"Presumably you know why we're interested. Why not take that information to the Grandmaster and expose him as the traitor he is. I'm sure Lord Cantor would be very generous to one of his Councillors that exposed such a man..." Vodo wished the Regent was there in person so he could read the man's emotions.

"I'm not interested in that," a man of few words Atra spoke volumes in what little he did say, "but I do have an interest in seeing Capital Enterprise's share values drop."

And a grudge against that Chiss basard too no doubt, Vodo thought to himself. Standing, he paced around his desk to stand beside Andan before the hologram, beginning to pick up on the Umbaran's meaning. "Okay. You know where he will be. I presume this information isn't free?"

"No," the Regent answered simply before changing the topic. "What a lovely painting."

The Twi'lek raised an eyebrow, missing the man's meaning at first before he looked behind him and saw the two and a half millennia old painting of Taris skyline in all its ruin and glory. It began to dawn on him, "This? Oh, it was one of the few pieces that survived Cotelin's scouring of Karufr and my estate. I have a small collection of artifacts of interesting and ancient provenance."

The Regent's eyes were hungry with desire, "I should like to see your collection in person."

"That could be arranged, Your Excellency," Vodo folded his arms over his broad chest, "but I think I should attend to Rhyllance before then."

The Regent nodded, bowing one side of his face to the ground from the neck. "Indeed."

Another chiming noise from Vodo's terminal announced it had received something just before the hologram of the Regent blinked off. Returning to his desk Vodo examined the data scrolling across his screen and tensed. Andan, reading his body language quickly joined him at the terminal and read along.

"I don't believe it," the other Taldrya said.

Vodo nodded thoughtfully, "We need to speak to the Proconsul."

“You want to *what?*” The Proconsul was incredulous.

The Twi’lek towered over the Ranger atop his fearsome prosthetic legs. Standing near to two-and-a-quarter meters Vodo looked down the length of his body to newest Scion of Taldryan. Justinos Taldrya Drake was a smidge under a full meter but he had a large presence.

“I must have misheard you because it sounded like you were telling me to pirate you a Principate ship then let you fly it into the Principate fleet to tell their commanding officer you didn’t think it was very soccer his men came over and shot the Consul. And now the man who slept with your mistress is going to meet with him—” The Aleena’s mouth was slightly too large for his head, proportionately but he spoke with an easy-going grace.

Vodo cleared his throat, “Stop mincing my words.”

“Oh, I’m not mincing them. I’m just clarifying and revealing the nature of your request. You speak in riddles to give yourself some plausible deniability when someone like me calls you out but I calls them likes I sees them Biask and I’m calling you out. You want me to use fleet resources to steal a ship from a faction we are not at war with. That’s piracy,” the Proconsul crossed his arms.

They were aboard the *Resurgent* in the Consul’s ready-room off the main bridge. Justinos did not seem inclined to sit at Rians desk in Rian’s chair as it was clear from the stack of holopads atop a table against the wall and the four-legged chair piled high with assorted boxes acting as a booster that he did his work there. He’d apparently been busy handling the business of the Clan, a burden Vodo remembered all too well. Back then his ready-room had been aboard the newly commissioned Cotelin-class Star Destroyer *Justice*. It was something of a bitter irony now considering Jac Cotelin’s betrayal of them while he was Pravus’s Justicar.

“Yes. I want you to steal me a ship,” Vodo admitted, wondering how it was the Aleena had disarmed him so effectively.

“Oh, if that’s the case, the answer is absolutely no,” Justinos clapped his small hands once joyously and then ambled to his chair that he took a moment to climb into.

“That’s it then? You’ll just let the Brotherhood go to war with the Principate and the Collective?” Vodo accused the man, “You know how important it is that this war be prevented.”

With that the Aleena looked at Vodo coldly, "If only I believed that you cared anything for what devastation this war would bring. You and I both know this only goes so far as to satisfy your eternal feud with Rhylance."

And there it was: the thing that made everyone otherwise inclined to believe and help him turn away with suspicion. Vodo's animosity towards the Chiss Colonel was well known and that knowledge tended to color the lenses of anyone listening to Vodo's explanations of Rhylance's financial dealings, his associations and collusions, and ultimately the treason it all amounted to.

Cooly Vodo responded, his hard eyes locking on the far more friendly ones of the small alien, "I won't lie and say I am not looking forward to undoing that man but it would be dishonest to say that I wasn't in this also to keep this situation from spinning out of control. You can help me and we can get this done quietly."

"And what, ask forgiveness afterward for potentially ratcheting up the tensions between they and us?" Justinos shook his head and turned to the datapads before him, looking for the most recent item he'd been working on.

Andan, who had been uncharacteristically quiet this entire time finally spoke, "You're new around here."

The little alien's scaly skin bristled but Andan plowed on, "This organization is at its roots still steeped in the philosophy of the Sith and the Dark Side. Strength is what it recognizes. Anything can be justified ex post facto so long as it is done with strength. What Vodo is proposing is hardly novel in that regard. If it goes sideways it was his fault, and yours for enabling him, and you'll pay the Justicar's bill for it. If it succeeds however everything can be forgiven in light of rescuing the Brotherhood's alliance with the Severan Principate... And just think of the rewards..."

"You were part of the Old Guard. You know I oppose Rhylance body and soul," Vodo picked up one of the Consul's trinkets from a shelf, "but you also know I would do anything for this Clan. What's good for the Brotherhood is good for Taldryan and right now that means developing a relationship with the Severan Principate and exposing Rhylance for the worm he is."

"This really is something Rian should have the final say in," the Aleena's eyes were big and round as he wrestled with the idea.

"Rian is stuck in a Bacta Tank for the next few days. This is your call to make," Andan was insistent.

With narrowed eyes Justinos looked at both of the taller men. “Even if I said yes, I can’t just peel off two ships and tell them to go hunt for some suitable vessel for you.”

Now it was Vodo’s turn, “You *are* new around here.”

The Twi’lek strode over to the Consul’s desk and pressed a few buttons into the terminal. The Holo-emitter came to life filling the air above the desk with a blue-white system map. With a few more commands the map began to populate with trajectory lines, blinking icons, and finally a flashing red one, “Since the moment the fleet entered this system its sensors have been taking stock of the entirety of the Lyra-3K-a system. Every planet and moon, every ship, and every signal.”

Andan joined him at the desk and stroked the stubble on his chin thoughtfully, “So all you have to do is search for something with enough parameters to eliminate everything you don’t want to see. You want a ship or ships that make regular trips through the same area and return to Greyson’s ship. What’s this then? A recon patrol?”

“Supply shuttle is more likely. Send the Orthanc and the Renegade and we can capture it, crew it, and use it to infiltrate the Princpate’s fleet” Justinos said without thinking.

Realizing he’d just helped them with the plan he covered his large mouth with both of his little hands, “I mean—”

Andan clapped the Ranger on the shoulder, “We know what you mean. Pass the word to the Commodore would you? Looks like we only have a few hours until the next shuttle passes through this remote area.”

Justinos sat there staring at the both of the Sith Warlords wondering how they’d so easily disarmed him.

From the void of space between the Moon of Thillon and the shipyards, the star of Lyra-3K-a burned brightly though it appeared to be only about thumb sized at arm’s length. A Sentinel-class shuttle cruised on its regular resupply course back to the 5th fleet’s command ship, the *Caelus*. The pilot and co-pilot, the only beings on-board quietly checked their navigational systems and making the necessary adjustments flipping switches and pressing buttons were taken by surprise when the wedge-shaped hulls of two ships emerged from hyperspace in close proximity to them.

“Contact. IFF verification failed; Taking evasive action,” announced the pilot.

The ship began to bank to port but found its path blocked. Staring down the length of a Raider-class corvette the pilot again jerked on his control yoke, "Make ready for hyperspace. Open a line to the *Caelus*."

The Co-pilot hit his console with frustration. "We're being jammed. Nothing is getting through! Oh frell! That cruiser is an Immobilizer!"

"Sentinel Shuttle this is the Taldryan ship Orthanc, shut down your engines and prepare to be boarded. You will not be harmed if you cooperate," a voice came over the com.

By the time the Severan pilots had been sufficiently debriefed and interrogated the slicers had gotten into the shuttle's records and filled in the blanks. The ship's mission was pretty straightforward and simple, the only trouble was that it was now nearly two hours overdue. The pilots had been replaced with Taldryan Expeditionary Force officers and the strike team stood assembled in the cargo area. They were an assortment of Taldryan's Equites ranging from Sith to Jedi. Vodo hadn't participated in something like this in years and it worried him. He was a familiar face amongst the Clan's special forces and often deployed in support of their missions but they were hardened, highly trained professionals. This group, while super-abled by means of the Force, had a much shallower pool of experience, a diverse set of skills, and had not trained to work or fight together.

They all wore their personal attire, whatever suited them best in a combat situation. For Vodo that meant the torso armor that left his arms free to move and his Armorweave cloak. Cymre Kall wore her tight fitting armor so that it accentuated her womanliness as well as a backpack that looked suspiciously like a jet pack. There was Quejo in his blackened heavy armor and cape, Raistline in his enveloping medium armor and Armorweave cloak, Andan in his own medium armor and full-body robe, and of course the Proconsul in his enhanced custom light armor. Sitting, polishing his blaster pistol behind them was Alexander Anderson. All had volunteered for the mission once Andan had put out the call while Vodo withheld his objections at bringing anyone with them.

"Everyone's clear? Are there any questions?" Andan asked the group.

"Yeah, I got one," Quejo raised his hand, the oldest one in the group by almost 20 years.

Vodo rested a hand on the heavily armored Juggernaut. "He meant serious questions."

"Oh, in that case I'm square," the old man smiled. "Just thought I'd try to lighten the mood."

"That's my job," Andan smirked.

"We're approaching the *Caelus*," the pilot announced over the cabin PA.

Vodo looked around at his comrades, "I'm grateful you're all here. You know your missions and you know that if we fail we will collectively be blamed for starting a war, for pitting the Principate and the Collective against the Brotherhood, and it may well be the end of our Clan. There can be no failure."

The Taldryans all nodded their understanding. Quejo, Justinos, and Raistline would seek out the detention block and locate Lt. Hanshu if he was still alive. The pilot would be a valuable resource to place before the Principate to explain Rear Admiral Greyson's own treason and to point out Rhyllance's activities. Cymbre and Alexander would make their way to the datacore of the Star Destroyer and slice into the ship's functions. Andan and Vodo would make their way to the Admiral himself where presumably they would find Rhyllance as well.

"We've been cleared to land," the pilot announced.

Vodo looked at Cymbre whom he'd been mentoring in recent months in the art of Illusionary magics. Her round eyes were sharp and intelligent and there was an animalistic part of Vodo that wanted her but he quickly tamped that down by reminding himself of what the last woman in his life had done to him. His apprentice Zakai was that woman's child, their secret love child from a foolish tryst years ago. Zasati's constant nattering and her habit of betraying him had hardened his heart to the affections of women. In Cymbre though he found an eager and capable student. With time and training her powers could rival his own skills.

"Clear your mind and focus on what it is you want them to see," he instructed her.

She gave him a coy smile, her full lips curling at the corners, "I'm not going to call you Master."

"Just do the work," he told her flatly, refusing to show he enjoyed her brand of sass, "That goes for all of you. Just get it done."

They all gave him their affirmations and they prepared themselves as the shuttle entered the Imperial Star Destroyer's cavernous hangar bay. As directed the ship slipped into one of the numerous sub-hangars where it sat down on its skids. The rear ramp lowered and light from the hangar spilled in followed shortly thereafter by an officer in a smart uniform with his datapad. To his eyes the cargo area was merely stacks of supplies and totes. So fooled by Dark Side magic his eyes slid over the group of seven Taldryans as though they weren't even there.

At Vodo's signal they exited the shuttle as a group and entered the Hangar. While technicians milled about the edges of the landing pad and the room itself they too took no notice

of the various Force users. Vodo smiled to himself but maintained his concentration on his own spells as he observed Cymbre managing hers. She and Alexander nodded to him and headed off to the left towards their objective while Vodo escorted the rest out a door to the right.

Once in the passage way they split up. Quejo, Raistline, and Justinos set off down a maintenance access corridor towards the detention block as Andan led them through the ship's byzantine layout towards the citadel. Every major warship is armored along its hull but additional armoring is laid out to protect the vital-most internal sectors of the ship. For the venerable Imperial-class ships that citadel covered the massive reactor buried in the belly of the ship and extended aftward to the roots of the jutting superstructure where the tubelaser magazines and turret assemblies rested. As they approached the citadel they were stopped by a checkpoint guarded by two Marines wearing the distinctive blue and yellow of the Principate's embarked infantry force.

Andan dragged Vodo back behind a corner, "We can't fight our way through there. We can, actually, but we'd alert everyone that we were aboard."

"We need someone to get us through," Vodo agreed, eyeing an officer approaching them from behind. "Wait here."

He approached the man, projecting the illusion of a junior officer of some near-human species, "Excuse me Sir, I seem to have misplaced my pass key. Could you vouch for my subordinate and I?"

The man's eyes went glassy as the Force pressed itself upon his mind. "That's highly unusual. What section are you with, Ensign?"

Vodo reinforced the image of a junior officer in the man's mind. "I already told you I was in the Main Battery. Please sir, it will just be this once."

He could tell the officer had already decided to help him but he made a show of making up his mind. "Very well, but I may yet decide to report this deficiency to your commanding officer at Mess this evening."

"Thank you sir," Vodo gestured for the man to lead forth to the checkpoint, Andan following them wordlessly as though he belonged.

The two guards eyed the strangers suspiciously but took the senior officer's word and waved them through. Suggesting the officer join them in a dark corner Vodo knocked the man unconscious and took his identity cylinders, handing one to Andan. Confident the man was out cold and well hidden they took a lift to one of the highest decks of the ship.

"Biask, this is Justinos," a small voice came through Vodo's wrist-mounted comlink.

"Do you have the Lieutenant?" Vodo asked lowly, keeping a passing Duros in a pressed uniform from hearing too clearly.

"Negative. There are no records Lt. Hanshu was ever in the brig," the diminutive Proconsul responded.

"Hmm. Kall, Anderson: are you hearing this?" Andan asked into his own comlink.

"Yeah. We're set up in the datacore," Alexander answered, his voice indicating his distraction level as his hands flew over a keyboard. "I'm running a search for him right now in the Ship's personnel data."

"We're not seeing any trace of Goreg Hanshu here," Cymbre added in after a moment.

Vodo and Andan looked at one another, sensing each other's thoughts through the Force. *He's dead*, "Okay. Detention team move to second objective. Datacore team keep doing your thing. We're headed in."

Closing the comlink line Vodo rolled his shoulders to loosen them, piling the bulk of his cloak behind them for maximum mobility. Andan did the same and both Sith plucked the lightsaber hilts from their belts where they hung. Before them was a blast door leading to the Admiral's wing, within which they'd earlier been advised by Alexander where they'd find Greyson and Colonel Rhyllance.

The blast doors slid open revealing a comfortably large conference room at the head of which stood two men. One was a stately older man, human with a tan complexion, who stood with the rigor and dignity of an Imperial Officer. The other was a blue skinned humanoid, a Chiss, with rich raven-black hair and glowing red eyes. He too stood with a strong military bearing. At the sound of the doors they looked to see who had entered. Where Hiram Greyson adopted a look of shock and surprise Rhyllance only smiled pleasantly.

"Ah, Biask," the Chiss said with a friendly tone.

"That's Biask?" Greyson said incredulously.

The Sith Warlords strode into the room. Andan crushed the control board beside the doors so that as they shut with a hiss they sealed themselves to prevent anyone else from coming in.

"You don't seem surprised to see us," Vodo said to the Colonel.

Rhylance smiled as he took off the non-corrective lenses he wore on his face, placing them folded in his breast pocket, "No, not really. I allowed a certain Dark Councillor to believe he knew my plans. Sooner or later I knew you would come running."

The Rear Admiral was incredulous and leapt for the com on the table, "Security! There are intruders aboard the ship! Send a team to my location immediately! Security? Security!?"

"Please stop embarrassing yourself, Admiral," Rhylance said calmly, "I know these two fairly well. They would not have come here without having taken care of a few necessities first."

Vodo remained still, watching Rhylance. Andan on the other hand made a show of walking about the room, picking things up and putting them back down wrong. He picked up a piece of paper and shredded it for seemingly no reason at all except to make a mess. The Admiral watched him in confusion for a moment before he squared his shoulders and regained his composure.

"So what is it then? You're here to kill me? That would be the biggest mistake of your miserable life," the man spat the words at Vodo and Andan, "The Severan Principate will never bow to the likes of you, especially not after you boarded my ship and killed me in my own quarters."

It was Vodo's turn to smile. "Truth be told, I'm here for him. You're inconsequential."

"The problem with that, Vodo, is that Hiram here won't allow you to take me off this ship. I'm here by his invitation whereas you are not." Rhylance pulled the blaster from his hip holster and pointed it at the half-cyborg Twi'lek.

Now positioned in the corner of the room Andan activated his lightsaber. "Let's not get too rowdy, Rhylance. How about you put the weapon on the table and slide it over my way."

Vodo stared into the Chiss's eyes, his right hand flexing on the haft of his saber hilt. He could feel the rage building inside of him. He could see in the face of the Colonel every injustice, every slight, every crime, and every defeat he'd suffered at that man's hands and it incensed him but for once he placed a tamper on his fury. Where every fiber of his body wanted to explode over the conference table and to hack the Chiss into little pieces Vodo merely stood still and unmoving.

"You should do as he says, Rhylance. You're coming with us, its over," he said with a measured cool.

"Why would I do that?" Rhylance placed a coy finger on his lips. "Oh, do you mean your little 'Dossier'? I am not too concerned about that."

"Your treason is laid bare in those files, Rhy lance. We have you dead to rights," Andan grinned.

"Perhaps, but as I've heard you have had a difficult time disseminating that information. I imagine you will continue to experience such difficulties and all will be for naught," the Arconan began stepping to the side so that both of the Sith in the room were before him.

Vodo began to move to block him so that Andan and he would remain on either side of him. "You imagine wrong. Once the information gets into the hands of the Principate's Triumvirate you're done for."

Rhy lance shrugged. "The Admiral isn't going to pass that information along, are you Hiram."

Hiram Greyson puffed out his cheeks. "No, I don't think I will. It was very kind of you to hand it to me as it made me aware of a new ally to keep your stinking 'Brotherhood' away from our system but I think it's outlived its usefulness."

"I'm glad to hear that." The barrel of the blaster in Rhy lance's hand swung from Vodo's chest to Greyson's. With two brief retorts the weapon discharged and a small puff of smoke emerged from the Admiral's chest.

Greyson turned his head in surprise to look at the Chiss, unaware that he was already dead. He collapsed to the deck with a crash, his head catching on the edge of the table with a crack. Everything began to move quickly. Andan leapt into action, clearing the table with a Force assisted leap. Rhy lance dived under his decapitating strike and slashed at Andan's arm with a blade he produced from somewhere as he passed. Andan clutched at his sword arm with his off hand in confusion, looking unsteady on his feet. Vodo deflected several of the blaster's bolts with his lightsaber preventing him from closing with the Doctor. As he wove his lightsaber defensively around him he felt a white-hot prick of pain cross his cheek.

"Careful, Andan. You are going to start to feel your movements are inhibited and that your nervous system is not responded as it should." Rhy lance reached over and gave the Sith a push.

Andan stumbled backwards awkwardly before catching himself, barely, on a bulkhead wall. He slid to the floor with a jerking motion as he tried to remain on his feet but found his knees refusing to work as he expected.

"As for you, Biask... I meant to bury that scalpul that grazed your face in your shoulder but I suspect that it will work well enough." The Chiss was all teeth he was grinning so broadly.

"What? What did you poison me with?" The Twi'lek's hand shot to his face where a small trickle of blood coated his finger. "Whatever it is, it won't change anything!"

"You just murdered Rear Admiral Greyson", Rhyance told Vodo with a smile, "but it's well that I was here to confront his assassins. I'm afraid the peace process won't work out too well for the Brotherhood though, given two Taldrya were at fault."

Vodo stared into those glowing red eyes, so full of confidence and victory, for moment before deactivating his lightsaber. The room was quiet for a moment but that silence was filled by a guttural laughing that started low and then erupted from the Twi'lek. Rhyance lowered his weapon, confusion and disappointment playing across his face.

"Did you just crack? I did not take you for one of those mewling parasites that loses all his faculties when you realize you have lost so completely." The Colonel shook his head consolingly.

Taking a deep breath Vodo cleared the laughter from his chest, "No, I haven't cracked. It's just that I can't believe this plan has worked so magnificently."

"Plan? How can any of this be going according Your plan?" Rhyance holstered his blaster, confident enough that he was calling his adversary's bluff.

"You didn't see Andan placing that camera bug on that shelf then?" Vodo pointed to a shelf where several of Hiram Greyson's affects had been haphazardly rearranged by the other Sith, "No? Then you didn't realize that you had admitted to the Dossier's value and then killed a Principate flag officer on video?"

"What?" Rhyance was struggling to grasp what it was he was hearing.

Vodo coughed, specks of blood flew from his mouth and when he smiled, his sharpened yellow teeth showed the stain of more, "Cymbre, are you there?"

The woman's voice came through his comlink, "I'm here."

"Is it done?" Vodo asked.

"It's done" she answered.

Rhyance's eyes showed concern and bewilderment at the rapid series of reversals, "What's done?"

Coughing again, with more blood, "I have a team in the datacore of the ship. They've taken over the communications of the vessel and have broadcast that bug's recording on every

available frequency and channel to the Principate and the Brotherhood. You're done for, Doctor; Your treason is laid bare."

Vodo collapsed to his mechanical knees as the Doctor's poison began attacking him in earnest. Focusing, he seized the Force and lead it to the site of the cut on his face. It was a white-hot burning line that stretched across his cheekbone and radiated lines of electrical pain across his face, down his neck, and across his body. The Force slithered under his command but plunged into the wound and stitched it up neatly enough but for the poison it could do little but slow its progress.

"It appears I underestimated you," the Chiss walked up to Vodo and squatted beside him.

The Doctor made a show of examining his victim, "I have not had a chance to test this particular poison in the field yet but it appears to be remarkably virulent. I will be leaving now Vodo, it appears I will need a healthy head-start but I will leave you with this."

Rhylance laid a small vial beside Vodo's hand, "It's the antidote and it must be administered by hypospray in the next five minutes or your flesh will quite literally begin melting off your bones. Goodbye Vodo."

The fury within Vodo still burned brightly and it was at that moment Vodo released his hold on it. He seized Rhylance's arm, surprising the Doctor, and pulled him down. Vodo's forehead smashed into the Chiss's nose, stunning him. The Colonel struggled under Vodo's mass as the Twi'lek straddled him. With one hand Vodo closed his fingers around the Chiss's throat and squeezed tightly while with the other hand he fought off Rhylance's desperately flailing arms. Vodo felt thud of Rhylance's scalpel connecting with his armor and failing to embed itself in flesh. Gradually the flailing reduced in speed, strength, and frequency. Vodo's yellow-red eyes drank in the fading light from the Chiss's glowing ones beneath him. When the struggling ceased and the Doctor's chest heaved for the final time in one last desperate attempt to fill his lungs, Vodo finally clutched the traitor's head with his free hand and pulled violently. He felt the vertebrae popping and cracking under his hand around the Chiss's neck more than he heard them and knew that the deed was done.

A medical droid pattered around the sterile room, arranging implements and sensors to its programming's desires. When the brown haired human man entered the droid made a low greeting. The man explained his presence perfunctory and the droid bowed before leaving. At the center of the room was a bacta tank, its volume filled with the pale blue lifesaving liquid and rising air bubbles that had the power to bring the mostly dead back to life.

Floating suspended at its center was a Twi'lek with pallid green skin. More striking than the blackened scarified tattoos upon the length of both of his Lekku was the fact that his body ended below the waist. A small metal roundel, the size of a fist, emerged from the bottom of the man's torso and would plug into the unique reverse-articulated prosthetic legs he normally strode atop.

"The droid tells me you're alert, Your Excellency," The man stood close to the glass of the tank so that his face was no further from the man within's than in a normal conversation.

Vodo Biask Taldrya opened his eyes, his face hidden behind a plastimold mask where considerable surgery had been performed. Unable to talk he studied the human who stood before him. It was a face he was only vaguely aware of, though he didn't think they'd ever met. He certainly wasn't a Taldryan or an officer from this ship.

The man, satisfied Vodo was awake and listening, "I am Kalan Amak, Praetor to the Grandmaster. I've come at Lord Cantor's instructions to convey his thanks for helping to expose a traitor within the Brotherhood and to help prevent conflict between the Brotherhood and the Severan Principate."

From within the tank Vodo listened to the words but thought only of the feeling of Rhyllance's soft flesh between his fingers. He replayed that sweet moment of triumph through his head over and over, feeling the popping of cartilage and ligaments in the Chiss's neck tearing as he pulled one way and pushed the other.

"What you accomplished sets the very highest standards of conduct for a member of this organization. You are a credit, Lord Cantor wishes me to tell you, to your Clan and your fellow Taldrya," Kalan grasped his hands behind his back. "He further instructs me to convey his profound apologies that word of your intelligence regarding the traitor never made it to his attention."

"You must understand though that your invasion of a Principate ship has created some trouble for the Deputy Grandmaster who has resumed talks with his hosts. The story is being told that Mutineers from the Fifth Fleet attacked your friend and colleague and that you boarded the *Caelus* to discuss the situation with their Rear Admiral. Unfortunately that same Rear Admiral was killed by said mutineers it seems." Kalan pursed his lips and shrugged apologetically.

"The Principate has agreed to sweep all mention of Greyson's treason under the rug along with that of our own Colonel Rhyllance's," Kalan made a motion with his hands that suggested the scales were balanced as a result, "because there was no traitor within the Brotherhood you can't very well have tracked him down and killed him. You will be officially mentioned in dispatches for approaching the Admiral to amicably settle the attack of the mutineers upon your Consul and nothing else."

Vodo's eyes bulged in anger. A rush of bubbles streamed from beneath his breathing mask as he bellowed. The tank began to flex and small fissures began to spiderweb their way around its circumference as the Force pressed out on it.

Kalan held a hand up between he and the Sith, "Peace, Master Biask. The Grandmaster knows this is unfair to you but it is best for the Brotherhood. In return for your silence and your compliance he offers you this."

He held a holoprojector in his other hand. It was palm-sized and appeared to be quite old. From its top it glowed to life and projected a starmap that slowly rotated clockwise around the device's edges, "This was located by a Professor in the Shadow Academy only a few days ago while seeking the whereabouts of a holocron belonging to a certain Sith Lord. Knowing your interest in such things he offers you this and your life as a reward for your-- loyal service."