

Arcia Cortel, [3463](#)

Rulvak Qurroc, [14025](#)

C'ree, [alternate](#) 3463

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E-9 Explorer *Centurion*

En-Route to Thillon Research Facility

Arcia Cortel stood behind her pilot, Wes Belvoa, as he wordlessly maintained the ship's systems during hyperspace flight. She remained silent as she studied over his work and nodded before turning to exit the bridge of her ship. Passing through the main lab and past the sensor globe station, she entered the main corridor and proceeded through the ship towards the old lounge, which was converted into an EWS bay. After entering, Cortel sat in a somewhat comfortable chair before her fingers flew over various keys as she entered commands, the keys clacking in response as they were pressed.

She studied the results of her queries and shook her head. From the looks of the intel, her ship was barely outpacing the Collective forces. As a combat strategist, she planned to take advantage of the Collective's efforts of disrupting the Principate facilities' communications. While this was generally a good thing for their mission, it would hamper their approach as the facility was likely already on high alert due to the disruption. Why she had agreed to use her personal ship as a means of transport for the mission still bewildered the woman, but the deed was done and she trusted her partner assigned for the duration.

Rulvak Qurroc and Cortel had worked together in the past while the two were allied with Clan Arcona. Qurroc had caught Cortel's attention while she was seeking individuals holding specific skills sets, and he had been one of the better choices that she remained in contact with over the years. Though he was an alien to her, and a user of the Force, their past service together created a respectable working relationship between the two that Arcia would honor.

"Nice ship," a familiar voice came from behind her. "Reminds me of the old *Nighthawk*, just a bit smaller."

Cortel turned to face the Sephi and pressed her lips together. "Nostalgic, are we?"

"Of course not. Where are we with the mission?"

Rulvak entered the room and glanced over the various screens of intel in front of Arcia. She leaned back in her chair to not cloud his view and waited for him to analyze the information on

his own. When Qurroc stood straight once again, he shook his head disapprovingly. She knew exactly what he was thinking, as she had just been thinking the same.

“They’ll be on high alert,” the Sephi stated plainly.

“Yes, they will. Are you prepped for this sort of infiltration?”

Rulvak turned to look directly at Arcia. “We might be able to take advantage of it, as a distraction.”

“Advantage ho-” Cortel started, but was cut off as the ship’s communications system chirped to life.

‘Ma’am, we’re approaching drop out coordinates,’ the comms officer and XO of the *Centurion*, Lorilee Barrick, spoke out across the ship.

Cortel stood from her seat and followed the Sephi out of the EWS bay. Waiting for them, a light brown skinned Human woman was waiting with a data-pad, already offering it to Arcia who took it immediately. As her cybernetic eyes studied the contents, Arcia frowned. New intel had made itself known: the presence of a ship with unknown origins among the docking bay scans. This would most certainly be something to keep her eye on.

“Apparently there is an unregistered ship currently docked at the facility. We may not only have the Collective to worry about,” Cortel informed and looked to Rulvak.

“New intel? What happened to the days where you knew what we were getting into?” Rulvak asked rhetorically, revealing his desire for a well-thought out plan.

Lorilee cleared her throat softly. “I’ve also noticed that the facilities automated defense systems are having trouble with their transponders. I believe IFF checks are down across the board. We should have a smooth landing without resistance. Also, Mr. Belvoa has informed me that we’re making preparations to land just after exiting hyperspace.”

“Thank you, Barrick. We will be heading downstairs so Qurroc can finish prepping,” Cortel stated as she turned and began walking port side towards the turbolift.

Lorilee nodded her affirmation and headed towards the bridge as Rulvak followed after Arcia. The two remained quiet as they entered the lift and descended to the lower deck of the ship where the armory was contained. Any additional equipment Rulvak would need was stored there. A sudden lurch signified the ship touched down on the open docking bay. Arcia nodded to the Sephi and returned to the lift, intent on keeping a lookout for Rulvak from the EWS bay.

Rulvak moved down the ramp into the research facility's docking bay. It was fairly empty, which was strange for a station with klaxons blaring and emergency lights flashing. It did not bother him that there would be less of a presence in his way, but it did bother him that he did not know the cause. He proceeded into the facility, paying close attention to his senses.

It did not take long before the Sephi came across bodies in the halls, contorted as if they died in horror. This was something he had only heard of, but had never seen. He had made suggestions through the Force before, but never at this level.

He tapped his comm device, "Cortel, are there any Sith on the station's roster?"

'Not that I am seeing. Why?' Her response came through almost immediately.

"I'm going comm-silent. Will reach out if something comes up." Rulvak was not about to give away any details of his presence if he did not have to. If there was someone else aboard, he would know where they were first.

The Warlord moved forward more cautiously than before, keeping himself hidden from any other Force-sensitive individuals. He stepped over each body, knowing it would lead him to the source of this destruction. Hoping that the chaos would lead off in a different direction, he maintained the course towards scientific research bay. Body after body, the faces on the staff got to him. He began to fear it. The sense of dread overwhelmed his thoughts. The Sephi came to a halt and immediately disappeared from sight. He wouldn't be able to hold his cloak for long, but it was necessary to stay out of sight from whoever *that* was.

"I think we may have another problem. I cannot proceed, there is another Sith aboard blocking my path. I cannot move forward without revealing my position," his hushed voice barely audible.

'Repeat last, your transmission is unreadable.'

He tried again, but could not. The words would not leave his mouth. He tried to step back towards the direction he came, never letting his eyes leave the space in front of him. Half a step...another half...but it was no use. He could feel the presence of the being approach faster than he could move. Then he saw her: a violet-eyed, pale-skinned half-Sephi, the pink nearly drained out of her, causing the red facial tattoo to pop. She wore padded protective clothing, with the right arm covered in armored plates. Her deep raven hair, buzzed on the left side, came down in long matted strands to the right. It was as if the direct line of sight had an added effect, causing him to drop to one knee. He held his cloak, though it would not last much longer.

Mustering up what energy he could, he tapped his comm device once more, "Arcia, I think I may need help."

'What is it? What is your status?' her voice was joined by an alarmed tone not typically customary of the woman.

His voice emanating from seemingly nowhere caught the woman off guard. “There be sneaky ones? No, no, I see no one. Where?”

The woman’s voice came out almost as a hiss and it seemed as if she was talking to someone else, but Rulvak sensed no one. Exhausted, he could not maintain his cloak and concealment any longer. He looked at her, wondering why she was here until he saw the very object they had come to secure.

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‘Ma’am, Collective forces inbound now. Fabricating neutral codes and pinging now. Unsure how they will respon-’

A sudden explosion cut off Lolilee as the ship lurched from a force from outside. Arcia stabilized herself and began checking outward sensors, her brow furrowing at her discovery: the Collective forces had launched concussion rockets at the ship in the opposite docking bay, knocking it out of position so they could land. It was brutal, but effective. It also made the other ship unusable in the future. Arcia quickly opened Rulvak’s channel to update him on the current situation.

Principate Facility

“Oh, there be a sneaky one. What you doing here?” the woman demanded, her left hand moving towards a long wooden-paneled hilt at her side as her right was holding a black case.

‘Qurroc, it seems we do not have to worry about that other ship anymore,’ Cortel’s voice pinged in Rulvak’s ear, as the station shook without warning.

“I found the relic, but *she* has it,” Rulvak muttered.

‘She who? Who else is there with you?’ his comm chimed, revealing the confusion in the Human’s voice.

The half-Sephi woman put out her left hand to stabilize herself against the plasteel glass window and looked out of it into the docking bays. The *Centurion* sat securely while the other ship had been forcibly moved by a large explosion and another ship had taken its place. This new ship revealed a Collective designation.

Noticing the anger on the other half-Sephi’s face, Rulvak’s perception picked up on the fact that the unknown ship was indeed the property of the individual in front of him. Knowing he had no

chance of getting the artifact from her, he came up with the quickest way to get the relic on board.

“Might you need a ride out of here? It sure looks like quite a few Collective forces out there, and I’m fairly certain you don’t work here.”

The woman turned and sneered at Rulvak. “Take me. Go. Lead.”

Rulvak felt the dread presence around him drop and immediately rose to his feet. He turned and led the way back to the docking bays, hoping to not run into any more unexpected problems. As they entered the bays, they were indeed greeted by a hail of blaster fire from the Collective ship, as it was in the first of the two bays. At their range, however, it was relatively easy for both Rulvak and the other half-Sephi to weave themselves around the fire and make it to the *Centurion*.

As they ran up the ramp, the ship began to power up and close the cargo bays. Sounds of blaster fire from the *Centurion*’s armaments rang out from outside the ship as explosions and cries of pain were barely audible. Arcia appeared from one of the turbo-lifts as the ship began to lift off and leave the facility, her eyes narrowing at the new guest.

“What is she doing on my ship? What is going on?”

“Cortel, later. Let’s just get out of here.”