

JORM NA'TREJ

EXCIDIUM



IRON SKY
EXCIDIUM RESTRAINED

Voices both harsh and attentive. Steps taken with purpose. Beeps begging for attention. The soft, barely noticeable rumble of machines waiting to awaken.

The little sounds and tactile impressions of a capital ship ready to spring into action, muffled by thick bulkheads and dark fabrics that made the new Empress' ready room aboard *Retribution*.

The already dark chamber sunk in featureless gloom with the lights off, illuminated only by a large holotable. Rapidly changing scenes in full color dimly reflected on Shadow Nightunter's face and Mune Cinteroph's fur while the Empress flicked through the muted feeds in silence.

Flick. A helmet camera worn by a Stormtrooper officer transmitted a firefight, red and blue blaster bolts crossing paths, striking both cover and flesh.

Flick. A Scholae combat vehicle escorting a unit of Meraxian rebels, giving the defectors a slightly better chance to die in a productive way for Shadow's Empire.

Flick. An artillery unit, recording monumental hits against a strong shield.

Flick. The holo showed a handful of men and a few speeder bikes in the hold of some troop transport. Most of them wore modern, garishly decorated Stormtrooper armor, except for a bronze-skinned man with cornrows and a wicked smile.

Shadow hesitated.

"He looks so unphased," she commented the view.

"Yet I felt him churning when the Council confirmed my ascension."

"Indeed," Mune confirmed.

"But Jorm fights under your command right now, leading Excidium literally from the front lines. It must suffice for now," Mune underlined his statement by turning his gaze at his Empress, away from the hologram where the men straddled the bikes heavily laden with munitions two apiece.

"I don't know," Shadow replied.

“He already has his private army, distinct from Scholae’s military. He *is* Sith. And did you notice how *Retribution*’s officers look at him?”

“I saw, Shadow. They revere him. He saved their lives on *Sidious* when he facilitated the boarding of this ship.”

Mune shook his furry head and blew air out his nostrils.

“Actually, I’m not sure who they and *Retribution* would side with if he decides to challenge you. That is your concern, yes?”

“One of them,” his superior confirmed. Then they watched on in silence.

On the holotable, the transport’s side doors slid open and released the speeder bikes with their wayward riders. Shadow became suddenly aware that the transport was a LAAT flying low over water at considerable speed, and the soldiers had turned themselves into missiles.

With raised eyebrows she took in the situation and attempted to make sense of it.

“This looks like the river,” Mune echoed her thoughts.

“But how does he want to get in? Intelligence claims that the shields extend down to the water surface, and the riversides are full of armed guard posts.”

“He’ll do something ballsy, I presume.”

Shadow snorted.

“He only has a handful of men with him. He always goes in small numbers when he goes crazy. Enough to get the job done. No wasted lives. Bigger bragging rights.”

Mune chuckled.

“See, you know him that well - what do you fear of him?”

Shadow replied wordlessly by pointing to the holo. The camera was on the bike behind Jorm’s leading one, and recorded a large piece of flat metal tearing free from its restraints under the vehicle. Captured and guided by forces unseen, it flew ahead of the bike and cut into the river like a blade. A trench opened up, two meters deep and wide, walled by

churning water on three sides. The bikes lined up like pearls on a string and dived right into it.

Mune whistled tonelessly.

The holographic walls of water came alight under the impact of blaster bolts from outside the trench. Steam and vapor reflected the burning plasma that had created them. A wall of blue-ish light came up in the mist ahead and passed over the bikers' heads. A display visible near the bottom of the transmission showed a not so modest three-digit velocity.

"They underran the shield," Shadow summarized.

"As I said, ballsy. And the method is... inspired."

"I retract my question," Mune said.

"You fear that inspiration is turned against you. That you would see the strike coming from a mile away, but be unable to tell *how* it comes."

"Yes," Shadow admitted bitterly.

"That and this damn luck of his. Right place, right time, and right idea coincide a little too much with Jorm for my taste."

The bikes on the table jumped out of the trench and over the riverbanks under hard acceleration. Missiles and grenades started their final voyages as Jorm's team went on to their target.

"I'll let him wreck that shield energy grid, but then..." Shadow mused.

Her sleek fingers danced over a keyboard and called up a list of options, of which she highlighted one.

Mune looked at her choice. His eyes glazed over for a moment.

"He will survive," the Shistavanen simply stated.

"Survive an orbital bombardment? That is hard to believe, Mune."

“He will,” Mune reassured her.

“The question is only if he will return as your questionable subordinate, or an open enemy. And who will side with him on either path he chooses.”

Shadow eyed the holotable wearily. Her hands still hung over the keyboard.

A minute passed. Then two.

Finally, she sighed and closed the interface.

“See what I endure for the Empire,” she lamented.

Mune nodded solemnly.

“For the Empire.”