

Coruscanti Crucible

The gentle hum of the *Nightjar's* engines had a hypnotic effect on the young Sith strapped into the gunner's seat. Nodding off ever so often as the Decimator glided through space on an impromptu patrol mission. Recent Collective activity in the system had put all of Taldryan on alert once more. It was just his luck that he drew the short straw and was handed this dull mission of patrolling the most common flight paths linking the moons of Perune.

In the pilot's seat, Celia was staring at several of the screen readouts. Only interrupting said action with the occasional yawn. While she preferred to be ship-bound on most occasions. Even she had to admit to the tedious nature of their current assignment. The status-quo was broken by an incoming transmission. Before opening the channel, Celia did a frequency check.

"*Paleface*," she blurted out her usual pet name for Arvalis. "You might wanna take this one in the lounge."

"Yeah?" He replied, not really all that engaged.

"It's the Inquisitorius." She said adamantly.

"Oh..." he sighed. "Well, at least we'll see some action then?"

A long drawn out "Yeah" left the blonde pilot's lips. "I'm not a fan of the inqs brand of *fun*."

Rising from his seat, Arvalis stretched his entire body in an upward motion before letting out a deep seated yawn while making his way downstairs to the lounge area. The *Nightjar* had been fitted with an electronic warfare suite early on in its service. It provided the ship with all manner of equipment suitable for an agent of the Brotherhood. One of the more vital components was its long-range communications hub. Allowing near instant access to even Arx.

With the press of a few buttons, Arvalis managed to patch the holocall through and the blue-ish hologram of the Inquisitorius sigil sprung to life. Moments later a still scrambled voice rung through, prompting the Umbaran to place his personal Inquisitorius access disk into a hidden slot.

"Credentials," the voice was crisp and clear. "Now."

Doing as he was told, Arvalis placed the Inquisitorius datapad into the holoprojector.

"Chief Inquisitor Raith. The Voice of the Grand Master has blessed you with a mission."

Coruscant was overwhelming. Even though *Chyron* was a planet-wide-city, or moon in its case, in its own right. Coruscant was loud, both in the physical realm and the Force. He couldn't fathom how many lifeforms were planetside. But the sheer noise, particularly through his Force sense was maddening. Painful even.

Arvalis had spent almost a full year on *Ostara*, the jungle moon of *Perune* in Taldryan's new home, the *Caelus system*. To come out of isolated training and find himself in this ant colony of chaotic life was both staggering and strangely confining at the same time, like a beast trapped in a cage with no bars.

Pulling out his datapad, the Umbaran swiped through several menus and tabs before finding what he needed.

“Fifty-three listening posts in this sector of the city alone? Ugh, fine. Whatever.” He mumbled to himself as he made his way to the nearest one.

The original briefing back on the *Nightjar* wasn't too informative. He knew the name of his target: *Manu Maurfai*, and that he was a Twi'lek, last seen on the mid-levels. Arvalis was hoping to find out more at at least one of the Inquisitorius' outposts.

“**Like I** said, is this all?” The disdain in his voice palpable beyond a shadow of doubt. The clerk almost took a dive behind his desk, were it not for Arvalis grabbing him by his collar and slamming him, head-first into said desk. “I don't know what kind of lackadaisical operation you're running here, pal. It's not because there's a thousand of these things planetside that you have a freeride to mediocrity.”

The blood dripping from his nose into his mouth made it hard for the man to breathe, let alone speak. With a whimper he eventually did however. “I'm sorry, Chief Inquisitor Raith.”

“Tsh,” Arvalis chided before looking at the console screen. “You've been tracking this broker scum for two weeks and have nothing to show for it. Beyond that he likes a drink and doesn't discriminate where he has it.”

“He usually frequents the same select bars lately.” The clerk sniveled, still nursing his nose.

Turning on the heel of his boot, Arvalis left without a word.

“Are you okay?” Another of the clerks popped his head around a corner.

“Y-yeah. I kinda enjoyed it.”

“...” The other clerk drew a blank expression as he slid back behind the corner before muttering “weirdo” under his breath.

Two distinctively indistinct men drew the Umbaran's eye as he scanned the seedy divebar. His eye fell on *Manu Maurfai* shortly after. It was by the will of the Force, with some coercing, that the Seeker had found the Twi'lek. He had a knack for finding people from literal pieces of scrap.

A smile rose on his face as he moved his cloak, displaying his lightsaber nonchalantly, immediately becoming aware of the eyes that fell on him as he did so. He did not care, the Collective wouldn't dare make a move. Not yet at least.

Sliding in next to the Twi'lek at the bar, Arvalis slid some credits his way.

“What's this?” Manu said.

Setting in a monotone voice as he drew the Twi'lek's attention towards his hand.

“You will draw your blaster and shoot those two men in the fifth booth.”

“Why would I do that? Are you an idiot or something?”

Doubling down, Arvalis sunk deeper into the currents of the Force. In his mind's eye, shadowy tendrils extended from his own mouth, creeping towards Manu's head and piercing his skull.

“You will shoot the two men in the fifth booth.”

“I will shoot the two men in the fifth booth.” Manu replied dryly.

The thrusters of the *Nightjar* were already fired up as the unlikely pair came running through the dock, blaster fire trailing them and resounding off the walls. Manu's face showing

a mixture of confusion, anger, and nervousness. Arvalis on the other hand was rather relaxed, a hint of a smile even.

“What did you do, Umbaran?!” Manu shouted, his voice barely rising above the engine noise.

“I’m saving your ass from the Collective. You shot them, remember.”

“I-I don’t remember.... I-I wouldn’t....”

“Then why are they shooting at us. At YOU wise guy?”

“I don’t know!!! It’s all so foggy and crazy in my mind.”