

Price of a prize

Augur Xantros

11518

38 ABY, Nesolat station, high orbit over Arx

Xantros was packing in his temporary quarters on Nesolat station over Arx, which served as one of bases of the Shadow Academy. His tenure as one of Magistrates to the Headmistress ended and he was preparing to leave the station and come back to the Empire so that he could continue his service to Clan Scholae Palatinae. Suddenly, he heard the alarms beeping all over the station. It was a very specific alarm – Nesolat was under attack by unknown forces. He left his quarters in the administrative area of the station and almost immediately met Ciara, the Headmistress of the Academy.

„It is good to see you, Xantros,” spoke Ciara. „We need your assistance.”

„How can I help?” asked the Duros.

„I ordered evacuation of the station, particularly the artifacts evaluated here, because the Collective cannot put their hands on these precious items,” answered the Warlord.

„So it is the Collective?” asked the Augur. If so, it meant troubles.

„Yes, we have identified their vessels,” confirmed the Headmistress. „Now, we are trying to slow down the advance of their forces so that we can evacuate the artifacts, but our defences will not hold them forever.”

„Do you want me to join our soldiers?”

„Not really,” explained Ciara as she handed Xantros a datapad. „I know that you are a skilled assassin, so I have a different role for you. There are extremely valuable artifacts in this part of Nesolat. It is far from where the Collective forces landed, but someone needs to protect our staff, just in case.”

„They could be protected by standard troopers, while I could help somewhere else,” refused the Duros.

„Yes, but you are an expert assassin, who can get rid of small groups of enemy troops. The more soldiers we can assign to defence, the more time we will have to save the artifacts.”

„Fine, I will help them,” agreed the Augur and quickly run towards the section marked on the datapad.

Xantros moved as quickly as he could, while carefully looking for enemies. He almost made it to his destination point, not bothered by any hostile forces, when he sensed two people nearby that seemed to have hostile intents towards the Brotherhood. It was quite a difficult situation as Xantros reached a junction and the hostile troopers were coming from the direction he had to go in. They could easily spot him. Luckily, the area was full of boxes lying in the corridors, so the Duros hid behind some of them.

Soldiers walked past him, but he could not recognize them. They were bald, their skin was pale-white and their limbs seemed to be artificially augmented as they were unnaturally thick. It would

be good to kill them as they could attack the crew of the Shadow Academy and interrupt the process of transporting artifacts into the safe zone. He focused and attempted to dominate mind of one of the troopers, but he could feel that something was wrong as nothing happened. It looked like the soldiers had strong minds that could resist his attempts to control them. He had to deal with them in another way.

Xantros used the Force again, to conceal his presence from his enemies. He followed the enemy soldiers and aimed his E-11 Blaster Rifle carefully at the one on the left. He shot twice and both shots hit the target, soldier's neck, killing him instantly. The other trooper turned around and immediately started shooting at the Duros, who became visible again. In the very last moment, the Augur utilized his abilities to increase his speed and run to hide behind another pile of boxes. Blaster shots missed him by mere centimeters. If he did that less than a second later, he would end up with several smoking holes in his body.

Xantros did not have much time, so he focused his mind again and created a sphere of darkness between him and his opponent. It was not very large. It was just four meters long in diameter, but as he anchored it two meters away from him, it covered him completely from the enemy vision. Sensing his opponent through the Force, he ignited his lightsaber and rushed towards the trooper, blowing through the heavy armor the person was wearing. Even from such a close distance, Xantros was not able to determine the gender of the soldier.

The Augur resumed his way to his original destination point. A bit nervous, if everything was fine, he reached the storage area he was meant to guard. He greeted the Shadow Academy crew that was preparing the artifacts stored there, but they were disappointed that he was the only help that came.

„We expected that the Headmistress would send larger reinforcements, because we were told about the importance of these artifacts,” spoke one of the workers angrily.

„They are important and this is why I am here, instead of fighting on the front,” explained Xantros. He could be very patient, when he wanted to. „All soldiers are needed to slow down the advance of the enemy soldiers, in order to buy us as much time as it is possible. I am dangerous enough to deal with whatever enemies could reach this place.”

The man was not convinced, but the Duros did not bother to try to persuade him again. It was not his task. He was there to protect the artifacts until they were safe. Few minutes later, he had an opportunity to prove his skills. He noticed two soldiers that looked exactly like the two he had killed earlier. He activated his lightsaber as they noticed him too and started shooting at him. Completely focused on the fight, he managed to redirect some of the incoming blaster shots towards his enemies, hitting them directly in helmets and killing them with their own blaster bolts.

Xantros searched the bodies and found two incendiary mines, four thermal detonators, four smoke grenades and two fragmentation grenades. He took them just for the sake of being prepared for any case. He always tried to be prepared for the unexpected. He also hid the bodies in a nearby storage so that any further enemies would not notice something wrong. Even more importantly, he thought that he might make use of these bodies before the evacuation was completed.

Soon, the Duros noticed a large group of the marines incoming. He quickly hid behind a pile of boxes and armed a thermal detonator. He threw it towards the enemies. Couple of seconds later, he heard an explosion. In the meanwhile, he armed and threw another thermal grenade to the place, where he expected his enemies to be. He did not want to fight the battle against so numerous enemy and he was determined to kill them all without having to face them, even though the boxes were the only thing that protected him from the blast.

Xantros looked from behind the boxes and noticed that no one was moving. All the marines were dead and their bodies, despite wearing heavy armours, were severely burnt by the explosions. Their smell was hard to withstand. There was nothing he could do to hide the signs of what happened. No one could under such circumstances.

A moment later, the Augur noticed another group of the Collective troopers at the far end of the corridor. They were coming towards his position and they would surely notice the effects of explosions and bodies of their comrades. He could do only one thing. He entered the room, where he hid two bodies of the collective soldiers. He scanned them carefully and focused. Using the Force, he altered his own image to match what the troopers looked like. A moment later he left the room as a different person.

He noticed that the new group of the marines was inspecting the area, where the dead soldiers were. He approached them and their leader noticed him.

„What happened here?“ the marine asked.

„I am not sure,“ replied Xantros. „It was like this, when my team arrived here. We eliminated the resistance of the Brotherhood forces.“

„Why are you here alone?“ continued the marine.

„I was left here to oversee transporting of the artifacts gathered here,“ explained the Duros. „My team moved to another section of the station due to heavy firefight taking place there.“

„Fine, we will go there too.“

Xantros showed them how to reach the section, where his imaginary team was fighting, and the troops moved there quickly. He sighed with relief. He just hoped the evacuation of the artifacts would be finished before more Collective forces would arrive there as he almost run out of ideas how to deal with them.

Twenty minutes later, the last part of the artifacts departed. The Duros left with it. Fortunately, they were not bothered by the Collective forces and they arrived at their assigned safe zone. Soon, they felt that the administrative section of the Nesolat shook. It was separated from the rest of the station and preparing for emergency landing.

Xantros smiled with satisfaction and relief. Though the new type of marines sent by the Collective was definitely a worthy enemy, he was lucky that he was not forced to fight other elite formations of the Collectibe, like the Huntresses. He was not sure, if he would be able to defeat them. Now, though they were not yet safe, the mission was successful and the artifacts were saved from the Collective forces. As soon as the administrative part of the station would land safely, Xantros was going to return to space and face the enemy again.