

[Alaris Jinn \(9426\)](#)  
[Arden Karn di Plagia \(13299\)](#)  
[Ronovi Tavisæn \(9676\)](#)  
(R 998, Ar 1007, Al 488)

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Co-Op:  
Waiting For Ghafa

**NOTE:** The following fiction utilizes various lines from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*.

*All aboard the Dreadnaught Ocaejar*, Ronovi thought bemusedly to herself, as she disembarked from her personal shuttle into a cold and now very dead hangar bay.

Bodies were already strewn about the transparasteel floor and propped up against abandoned bulkheads and transports, as the squadrons of the Ascendant Fleet had riddled them with scorch marks and turbolaser burns. Behind her, two more transports descended, their engines humming softly as if trying to remember an old tune as they landed. The reunited trio would do wonders together.

Kicking aside the stiffening corpse of a Partisan, Ronovi checked her equipment before tapping the comlink hooked over her ear. Reg, the trusty Bothan engineer, was on standby, as she and her team would be interested in finding any consoles or data banks to splice while on the ship. As it were, the assignments - or jobs, whatever she wanted to call them - had been delegated. Alaris Jinn, the prodigal Plagueian, would work with Ronovi to seek out Ghafa Ordam, while Arden Karn di Plagia would busy himself with the hacking and the ultimate planting of explosives to blow the damn thing into stardust. Then, of course, Arden would join the others to execute a diligent murder of the Liberation Front leader.

Ordam proved a more personal target to the Ascendant Clan than perhaps the Dark Council had bargained for once it had requested Plagueis's assistance. After all, the Nautolan was responsible for siccing Kel Zar on Aliso's slave population, attempted to remove their conditioning, and that had led to a messy, albeit failed, insurrection. Therefore, Ordam wasn't just a threat to the Brotherhood at large but also a lingering pain in both Arden and Ronovi's sides. Ronovi had been Arden's Wrath at the time of the "Assets' Asininity," as she liked to call it, and now, she was ready to swat down the incessant pest that had brought about the "infection." Arden, given his status as Dread Lord at the time, seemed more than happy to assist.

Gesturing with her cybernetic left hand, Ronovi watched as a stream of Wraiths, about a dozen of them, trickled from her shuttle like a line of ants, all in black armor and armed to the teeth. A dozen

Ravagers, in white armor, also descended from Alaris's shuttle, while a half dozen armed Subjugates followed Arden Karn out of his. The enslaved soldiers all quickly reassembled themselves to form entourages, as it were, for all three of the Plagueians.

"You all know what to do," murmured the Dread Lord, not in the mood to start a speech and wait for the *Ocaejar's* klaxons to go off. "Let's move out."

Arden nodded solemnly, checking the electroscope of his Sonn-Blas F-11D Blaster Rifle before silently beckoning his troops to follow him. As they disappeared down a winding corridor, Alaris and Ronovi exchanged a slow nod. The plan was that Ronovi's forces would lead toward the bridge, while Alaris provided back-up in case of any potential ambush by Collective troops. Neither of them were quite sure of either the quantity or caliber of the enemy soldiers onboard. Hive Mind Marines were certainly a potential opponent - Huntresses as well. The Collective was, ultimately, rather predictable.

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Arden managed not to show any discontent in front of Ronovi, but inside, he was seething. He'd come all the way back from the Corporate Sector in response to the call of the Iron Throne, and all they could find for him to do was storming a ship. Worse, Ronovi had taken the blue deserter to the bridge while sending him off to the engine room. While it was 'The Plan' for him to participate in the killing of Ghafa, he still wasn't convinced he would, battle being what it was. He also didn't have a lot of trust in Ronovi right now and even less in the blue bastard. Still, he had a job to do, and he wasn't going to let petty jealousy get in the way.

In a way, it could actually help.

After double checking the datapad with the schematics and getting his bearings, he pushed on with his fireteam towards the reactor core. While it would likely be heavily defended, other teams landing on the Dreadnaught would help thin out the herd. Eventually, a number of boarding parties would converge in the engineering section and prepare to blow the reactor. A simple plan, but generally an effective one from his experience.

It actually didn't take long for Arden's team to run into their first opposition: a rather startled quartet of Partisans. They barely had time to get their weapons up before Arden had dispatched two of them, the Ascendant Legionnaires handling the other two. This was to be the state of things for the next few minutes - scattered bands of soldiers and crewmen getting cleared out of the way while the Plagueians barely broke stride. Still, Arden knew there was a bigger fight coming.

When the group made it to a wide crossing corridor just before the entrance to the engineering section, Arden signaled for a halt. He gestured for one of the soldiers to check the corner before they

proceeded. After a quick peek, the soldier signaled that there were four targets ahead and then interlaced his fingers. The second signal was a pre-arranged code for something Arden hoped he wouldn't have to deal with: the Collective's Hive Mind Marines.

While they weren't the most heavily armed or armored, they more than made up for it in their unusual ability to see and think as one. Arden had read the intel briefs on the way in, but he never figured he'd actually have to deal with them. Still, he had a plan for dealing with them, though it was probably going to be painful. The idea would be to use their single-minded nature against them by making himself a target with the hope they'd keep their attention on him while ignoring his fireteam. It was maybe not the best plan, but it was a plan.

Shouldering his rifle, Arden took a deep breath as he pulled out his lightsaber. Igniting it as he stepped in front of the enemy, he simply locked eyes with the Collective soldiers. After a moment, he simply said:

"Bring it."

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*A broken chronometer is correct only once per cycle.*

It wasn't that Alaris thought Ronovi was unsuitable for Dread Lord. She was a megalomaniac, highly paranoid, and all too self-aggrandizing, much like Alaris himself. He just didn't trust her as far he could throw her; she was almost two feet taller than him and he wasn't particularly strong. He also didn't trust her judgement. The Horizon plague still sat in his head, an unfaded memory of impetuity. She was reckless and foolish.

Yet here he was, yet again, cleaning up her mess. Ronovi had taken point and threw herself into a violent array of slices and spins. *Reckless*. Her Wraiths, better suited for field operations than the boarding of starships, were doing what they could to mop up whatever she missed. Alaris's job was to ensure that she didn't get killed from behind, an irony he couldn't help but muse about.

His Ravagers were handpicked; the slaves who would have served anyway. They were cruel and pointed in their attacks, often choosing to leave their enemies alive, yet in excruciating pain. They had plenty of chances to slaughter partisans, as the two Dark Jedi and their squads moved like a bubble through the durasteel corridors of Collective air.

Alaris was resigned to simply deflecting most blaster bolts back from whence they came, and he was content with this. The Force tickled the back of his mind. It wasn't a warning, it felt like a memory: a

memory of the future. There was something about this place. Beyond the durasteel, fiber optics, plasma fields, and invasive technology.

*I've seen this all before.*

Alaris was used to visions from the future, but he didn't specifically remember when he had foreseen this event. It was a distraction he quickly waved from his mind as the Force screamed out a warning. His lightsaber swung by his head, almost by instinct, and deflected a bolt cleanly back to its source. The bolt entered the end of the blaster and ignited the tibanna gas inside. The blaster exploded, taking the arms, and life, of the partisan holding it.

The explosion was enough for one of his two surviving Ravagers to clean up their targets. The second one paused to take a breath. It was his last. Alaris's viridian lightsaber sliced through him from shoulder to hip and the two pieces fell to the ground unceremoniously. "Hesitation is a sin," he muttered softly.

Alaris turned back to Ronovi, who was approaching the bridge, and suddenly, something caught his nose. He had smelled it before, years ago, but couldn't place it specifically. He jogged up to the Epicanthix, doing his best to step over the dead around his feet. He called to her.

"Tavisaen, do you -"

He stopped dead in his tracks. As the smell overtook him completely, he remembered the future he had forgotten, and he suddenly realised just how much trouble they were in.

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It smelled sweet. Like molasses, or caramel. Whatever it was. Ronovi breathed, and soon, she promptly forgot where she was. Or who she was, even. The equivalent of a sour drink or a lemon left out in the sun invaded her nostrils. Everything around her felt dusty, abandoned. Far different from the sterile body of a ship.

She was standing beside Alaris, wearing a long tattered brown coat and a flat-brimmed hat. It was as if she were impersonating a hobo version of her Wrath, TuQ'uan Varick. She adjusted the brim, and she spotted a crooked, leafless tree beside them. Patches of dry grass rose past the heels of their boots. Alaris seemed to be trying to take one of his boots off, but it would not be released from his ankle.

Ronovi laughed.

“There’s man all over for you,” she crowed, “blaming on his boots the faults of his feet.”

Alaris scowled. “How long have we been waiting?” he demanded to know.

He managed to rip off the boot with one concerted yank, then toss the thing to the side as carelessly as one would a dead animal. He then gestured to the tree itself, his eyes glazed over, lekku twitching beneath his own bowler.

“Shall we hang ourselves?” he asked. “It’s the only way I can become aroused.”

They were waiting for...someone. Someone who hadn’t arrived in a long time.

“Let’s go,” said Ronovi.

“We can’t,” retorted Alaris.

“Why not?”

“We’re waiting for Ghafa.”

Ronovi blinked wildly as she enunciated. The air was dry on her tongue. She giggled wildly, incessantly. “What did we request from Ghafa?”

“Oh ... nothing very definite,” Alaris replied.

“A kind of prayer.”

“Precisely.”

“A vague supplication.”

“Exactly.”

Alaris started laughing, too. They both doubled over in their snickers. They were dressed in ragged coats and shirts and trousers, far from the powerful Sith they claimed to be. They were not in the *Ocaejar*, but in a cold, northern wasteland. They would meet a man who would not shut up and another who would only speak when warranted by a hat. It all worked out in its own mysterious way.

“We always find something, eh, Ronron,” snickered the Twi’lek, “to give us the impression we exist?”

A servant boy would come speak with them soon, to report that Ghafa Ordam would not come today, but surely she would arrive tomorrow. The murdering of the Collective fiend would simply have to wait! And so they laughed, and avoided masturbation, and found the scene all too familiar to a drama both had watched many years ago...

The smell was getting stronger. Lemonade on a hot day. Along the walls of the corridors the two dallied in, detonators and grenades blinked. Reg saw it all through his console on the *Ascendancy*.

“Kriff,” he hissed. “What did Ordam hook them on? What drug is this?”

He had seen Dimalium-6 act similarly. The two Dark Jedi were clearly hallucinating. They were precariously close to the planted explosives, and the soldiers of the Collective were closing in.

Reg reached for his commlink. Arden needed to know.

“Karn!” the Bothan barked. “Come in, Karn! Your friends are frakking *loaded!*”

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The call from the Bothan came just as Arden was making a sweep of engineering, his left leg singing in pain from a grazing shot from one of the Hive marines. Just before it came in, one of his two surviving soldiers had pointed out a strange message on the life support status monitor indicating the release of a foreign substance into the area near the bridge.

“So that’s what this is about,” Arden responded to the Bothan. “Ghafa is not just into explosives this time - she’s moved up to drugs.”

“Whatever it is, it’s a serious hallucinogen. You better get up here before they get themselves in more trouble,” Reg promptly replied.

“On it. Make a path for me and see if you can stop whatever it is they’re pumping out,” Arden answered, though he did have one other instruction to the Bothan before he broke off the communication. “See if you can record the security footage of this. It might be...useful.”

Once he was done with the Bothan, Arden gestured to his men to start planting the scuttling charges while he found one of the ship’s engineers that had been kneeling with his hands on his head near one of the consoles. Arden looked him straight in the eyes and asked,

“Where are your emergency breath masks?”

The engineer timidly pointed to a nearby storage locker, which Arden opened, locating a case with 3 of the devices. Putting one on himself, he slung the case over his shoulder as he stormed out of engineering. Reg had done a decent job of dropping blast doors and a few other tricks to give Arden a nearly direct path to the bridge largely unimpeded by the Collective. A couple of Partisans that were caught on the wrong side of a door put up a brief fight before the Plagueian put a shot cleanly through each of their torsos.

Just before Arden reached the bridge, he spotted Ronovi and Alaris. Much as Reg had suggested, their minds were definitely not on this ship and appeared to be a least half a sector away. Neither seemed aware of Arden's approach. There was an object in Ronovi's hands with a noticeable blinking light and a barely audible beeping noise. Ronovi was giggling as she looked over the object.

"Well, what do we do?" Alaris asked.

Ronovi shrugged. "Don't let's do anything. It's safer."

It didn't take long for Arden to figure out the object was an explosive, and thus, Ronovi's suggestion was not a good one. He quickly grabbed the object from Ronovi and sprinted the rest of the way to the bridge. Opening the door, he saw a surprised Ghafa barely a meter from the threshold. Arden threw the bomb at Ghafa, hitting her square in the chest. Arden gave a sly wink, then jumped back and activated the panel that closed the bridge's blast door. A muffled, yet satisfying, thud echoed through the corridor just afterward.

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Arden was fairly impressed with himself. The timing was perfect. If a holonovel had been written about Ghafa's assassination, it wouldn't have ended so beautifully. He was expecting to have to cut down guards, partisans, maybe a droid or two. Instead, it seemed somewhat anticlimactic. The worst part about the whole thing is that the only two non-slaves who could have witnessed such majesty were currently stalking about hanging themselves from a non-existent tree and comparing their weights. Ronovi seemed adamant that they weighed the same, but Alaris was sure he weighed more, a conversation that was even more comical, given the vast height difference between them.

Arden looked at the two drugged Equites in front of him. They were mumbling non-sequiturs and stumbling around one another. Ronovi moved her hand near her head as if she were adjusting a round hat that only she could see.

“Are you mad?” Alaris yelled out at Ronovi. “We must take cover!” He took her by the arm and began pulling her toward the exit, much to the satisfaction of Arden. “Come on.”

“How long,” Ronovi started, “have we been together all the long?”

Still pulling her along, Alaris thought about it and said confidently, “Fifty years, maybe.”

Karn glanced over at one of his two last troopers, who just shrugged back.

“Do you remember the day I threw myself into that river?” Ronovi was barely resisting Alaris’s pull.

“Yes,” Alaris responded, “we were grape harvesting.”

“Wait!” Ronovi called out suddenly.

Everyone stopped dead in their tracks.

“I sometimes wonder,” she mused, still lost in wherever she was, “if we wouldn’t have been better off alone, each one for themselves. We weren’t made for the same road.”

“It’s not certain.” Alaris paused in thought and then sat down suddenly.

“No,” Ronovi agreed, “nothing is certain.” She sat down in a slump on the durasteel floor with a clang.

“We can still part, if you think that would be better,” Alaris offered.

“It’s not worthwhile now.”

Arden Karn had stopped trying to do anything to move them and simply resigned himself to waiting for their stupor to fade. He looked at the Wraiths and Ravagers that had accompanied the two others and sighed.

“Plant every explosive you have here. We’re going to blow the ship sky-high.”

One Wraith nodded, and the others got to work, splitting themselves off in teams to evenly spread their payloads.

Arden slapped his comm. “Reg, we’re wrapping up here. Better get a couple bacta baths ready, in case these two start to get violent or something.”



A simple double click from the other side indicated acknowledgement, and Karn glanced back toward the two stoned Plagueians.

“Well!” Alaris declared, slapping his knees. “Shall we go?”

“Yes, let’s go,” Ronovi decided, definitively.

Neither of them moved.