The Commodore stood before the shaken form of the Empress, with twenty blasters trained on her. Her ornate robes were torn, and a mixture of dust and blood smeared her face, and yet, somehow she still managed to look regal, *strong* even.

Jon had only met Kaltani Anasaye once, accompanying Aura on what he had *thought* would be a matter of actual import. She had seemed… vain was the wrong word for it, but he couldn’t shake the impression of her, in her hand woven robes and surrounded by carved pillars, as a stereotypical noble: haughty and sure of her place in the natural order. She wasn’t the first Empress Jon had served after all, and given the way things ended with Elincia… well, he wasn’t as sold on the idea of royalty as he once had been.

And yet… and yet seeing her standing there, her palace in tatters and her daughter clinging to her skirts behind her? She stood, face still proud, eyes still defiant. For a moment - for just a brief instant - he could understand why her people called her their ruler with such devotion in their voices. He could remember his grandfather’s face, and the pride in his eyes when he spoke of Palpatine’s Empire.

She was about to be gunned down by a wannabe despot on a power-trip. Her children would be next, bodies broken for the simple crime of being *related* to a person Archturus didn’t like; and Jon was watching all of it, crouching behind a pillar. He had no idea where the rest of the Council were in this mess, much less his Squadron. He was not even remotely equipped to handle this.

Only one thing to do.

[“Well well well, what do we have here?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzWsLaolyLw)

Bluff like *Hell*.

Jon was the perfect picture of calm repose as he strolled out from behind the shattered remains of a pillar. His hands were in his pockets, far from the hilts of his blades, and his hat was tilted down to cover his eyes, but not the calm smile on his face. He looked, to all the galaxy, like a man who’d run into an old friend while taking a walk through the park. He didn’t blink when twenty blasters swiveled, and focused on him.

“Didn’t your parents ever teach you to respect women and kids, young man?” Jon asked, locking eyes directly with the Commodore. “Now, say you’re sorry, and we can forget this whole thing ever happened.”

“Who the devil are *you?*” Archturus snarled, face contorting in rage. Jon didn’t miss the way his dark violet eyes flashed sulfurous yellow; to anyone who didn’t know what they were looking at, it might’ve seemed like a trick of the light.

“I am… an idiot,” Jon declared; that spoken, he began strolling leisurely towards Archturus and the Empress, completely ignoring the soldiers and their blasters. “I’m also here to retrieve her Majesty and the royal brats for a *very* important meeting with her advisors, so if you don’t mind --”

There was a crimson flash, and a painfully familiar *snap-hisss!* before Jon found the crimson tip of a lightsaber poised before his throat. He stopped moving, but didn’t change his relaxed posture in the slightest.

“Do you know how to use that thing?” he asked, pointing to the lightsaber.

“Silvon,” Kaltani hissed. “What the *hell* are you doing? Where are the High Councilor and the Jedi?”

“Ah, there was some kerfuffle or other outside that they’re stuck dealing with. Apparently some wannabe tin-pot tyrant got a little too big for his britches and needed to be smacked back down, nothing they can’t handle.”

“You scum!” one of the soldiers roared, raising his blaster. However, the Commodore raised his hand, and the man immediately backed off.

*Hm, guess the old guy’s got his dogs trained pretty damn well.*

“Silvon, was it?” the Commodore asked. “I believe I’ve heard of you. The new commander of Aura’s precious Tython Squadron, isn’t that right?”

“Ah! Splendid,” Jon said, clapping his hands together. “Than you already know who I am, I’ll just take the Empress and her helion, and be on my --”

“Enough,” the Commodore huffed. “Men, this clown is no threat. I want you to search this palace top to bottom for his Jedi allies, though. If you see one,” his visage twisted into something hideously gleeful. “Take your time with them. We’re in no rush.”

*Oh good, he’s that kind of lunatic. Wonderful.*

After the Commodore’s kill squad had departed, it was just the four of them left in the shattered remnants of the throne room. Archturus turned away from Jon, raising his lightsaber over the forms of the Empress and her daughter.

“You’ve amused me, clown, but I suggest you be on your way. I have *plans* for these two, and I would be alone to do so.”

“Yeah, no,” Jon said, before drawing a suite of knives from within his cape, and letting them fly at the Commodore’s back. Raziel would’ve called that “dishonorable.” Jon called it “smart strategy.”

The blades spun through the air with perfect aim… only to collide with a glowing red barrier hovering in the air. The Commodore never even turned around.

“Very well then,” Archturus sighed. “Since you are determined to leave me no peace --”

The next thing Jon knew he was hurtling through the air, before colliding with the throne room’s great doors.

“--then I’ll make this quick, and get on with my day.”

Jon had just barely managed to gather his wits before he saw the massive form of the Commodore barreling towards him, crimson saber blazing a trench into the floor. Jon swore.

The mercenary rolled out of the way, throwing himself over one of the broken pillars, and trying to catch his breath.

“Wonderfully done, Jon, you got his attention,” he muttered to himself. “What the Hell was step two?”

As if in answer, Archturus was already on him again, his crimson lightsaber slashing through the air. Jon raised his wrists, firing rapidly from both vambraces. Not a single shot touched the raging sith, but they slowed him down just enough for Jon to find his footing again, and he made a break for cover.

Jon risked a glance towards the royals, and noted with satisfaction that they had the good sense to make a break for the door while the Commodore was distracted. Good, Jon just had to keep him busy and --

“Where do you think *you’re* going your Highness?” the Commodore growled, raising his free hand in the air. Jon felt his heart sink even as the broken pillar rose, hovering in the air, before launching towards the Empress and her daughter.

“No!” Jon shouted, thrusting his arm forward. Archturus raised his lightsaber defensively, expecting another volley of blasts. He was caught off guard by the grappling line that wrapped around his wrist. Jon capitalized on that brief heartbeat of surprise, and tugged with all his might, and Commodore fell to the ground directly on top of him, brining the two face to face.

“...Hello darling,” Jon said to the Commodore’s shocked face. That shock was immediately replaced by rage, and the Commodore *roared*, before bringing his head back and *slamming* it down onto Jon’s face.

Somewhere amidst the roaring of the Commodore’s lungs and the rushing of his own blood, Jon heard a most distressing *crack*. More by accident than any kind of strategy, Jon’s thumb found the button on his vambrace that activated the built-in repulsor, sending the Commodore flying back off of him.

Jon gasped for air now that the enormous weight was off of him, and desperately reached to trigger his suit’s bacta injector. The second his head stopped swimming from the cooling sensation, he clambered to his feet and looked for the royals.

He breathed a sigh of relief to see that they both had managed to be out of the way of the pillar when it fell. He began stumbling towards them as quickly as possible.

“*You…*” voice that was brimming with fury echoed from behind him. “You think you’re *funny* don’t you?”

“I mean…” he said slowly, silently signaling Kaltani and her daughter to get out. “It’s kind of my thing. And let’s be honest you… make it so *easy.*”

Archturus *screamed* with fury, and rushed Jon, who tried to tumble out of the way. Unfortunately, the injuries he sustained made it more like a clumsy stumble, but either way, right?

He raised his right vambrace, and triggered a spray of fire, filling the area where the Commodore had been with heat and flame.

*Please let that keep him down!* Jon prayed to any gods who were listening.

Jon fealt his heart fill with fear as the Commodore walked, unscathed through the flame and grabbed Jon’s wrist. He squeezed so hard, the metal in the vambrace *shrieked* and broke. As the broken metal pierced into his arm, Jon finally screamed.

“Enjoying this, are we, *clown*?” the Commodore smiled cruelly. “Come now, where’s all that bravado you had mere moments ago?” He squeezed harder, and Jon shrieked in pain.

“Enough, Commodore!” a voice cried out, but Jon’s mind couldn’t recognize it through the screaming agony pulsing through his head. “You said yourself, he isn’t *worth* killing! You’ve proven your *strength--*” and even in this state Jon could hear the sarcasm behind that word “--now leave the fool be.”

“Heh, the brave Empress, always rushing to the defense of her people,” Archturus sneered. Still, he did as she asked, and released Jon’s arm, causing him to collapse to the ground as though he were a puppet with its strings cut. Archturus turned away from him, and fully towards the Empress.

Jon, having regained his senses somewhat, realised that he couldn’t see Kaltani’s daughter anywhere.

*Ah, so that’s it*, he mused. *She let her daughter make the slip… while trying to help me?* Jon coughed up a bit of blood. *And they say I’m an idiot?*

Still, he could see the Commodore, seemingly having forgotten all about the now apparently down-and-out mercenary, stalking towards the Empress with his lightsaber in hand.

Part of his mind tried to convince him that this was enough; the princess had escaped, after all, so the Vatali line would continue. He’d given a good showing, and *nobody* had expected him to go toe-to-toe with a ticked off Sith when they hired him for this job. He really should just quit while he was ahead but… he always had been a gambler.

Reaching into his booth, Jon pulled his dagger Fang from its hidden holster. Using a broken pillar for balance, he hoisted himself to his feet, ignoring the pain shooting through his mangled arm.

*One shot at this*, Jon thought, raising his left arm with Fang in hand. He took careful aim, as much as he could with his vision swimming.

He had no reason to believe this would work any better than the first wave of daggers, but the Commodore was off-center now, tired and worn and utterly *furious*, so… maybe.

He let the dagger fly, curving through the air, aiming for the Commodore’s neck.

Archturus… tilted his head to the side, and the dagger only *grazing* his cheek, a line of blood moving to drip down his face. Jon smirked.

*Perfect.*

Archturus froze, moving a hand to his cheek where Fang had cut him.

He took his hand away from his face and looked at the blood - his *own* blood. He stared, wide-eyed, as though he couldn’t fully comprehend what he was seeing. Then, his visage contorted in rage, and his eyes snapped to look at Jon.

“Ok,” he said, his voice the absolute picture of calm. “Ok. *Now* I'll kill you.” And with that, the Commodore launched Jon into the air a second time, this time back across the room, causing him to crash *through* the splintered remains of Kaltani’s throne, and skitter to a painful haunt beneath the great glass windows behind it.

In an instant, Archturus was on top of him, one fist clenched tightly around his throat, the other raising his crimson lightsaber high, screaming in bloodlust and fury. Screaming so loudly, in fact, both men nearly missed the roar of engines, *very* close by.

Jon smirked, looking through bloodied eyes out the great glass windows, to see a *very* familiar squadron of fighters - all different makes and models, but all united by the shield emblem emblazoned on their wings - hovering outside of the windows to the throne room.

*“Attention Commodore Archturus,*” Raziels’ voice echoed from speakers. *“This is Tython Squadron! Please release our Captain, and surrender yourself for questioning!”*

All the fighters’ blasters began to heat up.

*“The ‘Or else’ is implied,”* Vez tacked on.

Archturus glared hatefully at the fighters, at Jon, at the world itself it seemed.

“You!” he snarled. “YOU! I’ll… I’ll…”

But the Commodore didn’t move, didn’t even speak in fact, as though his jaws were locking up.

“What’s the matter,” Jon coughed through the blood and pain. “Having a hard time moving? Yeah, that’d be the *poison* in my knife. Inhibitive type, very useful.”

Jon pushed himself out from under Archturus’ stilled form, and moving to his feet.

“Well, this *has* been fun. But, I’ve got a few other things to take care of today. I trust my friends here can see you to your nice cozy jail cell to await execution.”