I really had hoped I would be done running by this point. I left the Emperor’s Hammer almost ten years ago, and spent my time piloting a freighter on the edge of New Republic space. I had always kept my eyes out for old allies to pay me some kind of a visit but so far I had proved lucky. I had even settled into some small sense of calm in the Orian system.

I wasn’t the greatest Commander to come out of the TIE Corps or even out of my assigned squadron, but this Clan Naga Sadow seemed more interested in loyalty. Or at least, they seemed to hold a great interest in shows of loyalty. I had never been pressed too hard as long as I was obedient. Maybe I would have spent the rest of my days in the Orian system. Maybe I would have been able to eventually retire here, hiding out from the various remnants of the Empire who wished me ill. After what happened today, I am becoming far less sure however.

Looking over the top of the planter I had knelt behind, I had leveled my blaster in preparation at roughly the height of the dog-like creatures. To my surprise, I was met with nothing. “Where did they go? I have eyes on nothing!” I called the words over my shoulder, trusting that one of the white-armored soldiers was still alive.

“They keep disappearing.” The voice was almost in my ear. When I turned to regard the speaker, I saw only an older man crouching several feet behind a planet of his own. This hadn’t been the first time that I had run into this kind of phenomena, but it was always a bit off-putting. I exaggeratedly shrugged my shoulders, shaking my head. I could see this caused the man to heave his shoulders in a light sigh. He raised a finger sternly, locking eyes with me before placing his hands on the makeshift barricade and vaulting over it. His eyes flitted to and fro as he scurried to join me at my position.

“These creatures keep disappearing, Commander.” The use of my rank surprised me, but I tried not to show it. Instead, I forced a smile.

“What kind of story tale nonsense is that? Things do not just disappear. Are you sure you didn’t just lose sight for a moment?”

This statement appeared to humor the gray-haired geezer. “Would you take your eyes off these things in my place?”

I considered those words for the barest of moments before shaking my head, but my gaze did not leave somewhere around the horizon. “So, what kind of tools do the local space wizards bring to the Orian system in a case like this?” I motioned toward the man’s belt with a brief jerk of my head. “You have one of those glorified light sticks with you, right? I hope you have something else to bring to the table.”

There was a notable slump in the man’s shoulders. I tightened my grip on my blaster as I panned our surroundings, and resisted the urge to look the odd Jedi in the eyes. “I have seen dreams of this day. None of it has been good. There is something very dark, or very big out in the blackness. I cannot make it out.”

“So you have a light stick and a dream?” I let out a bitter whistle of mock appreciation. “Well, they better hope you aren’t packing heat as well. Otherwise, we might be able to take these things all on our own. Would make the boys in the white Warhost armor look like shmucks.”

The older man’s eyes narrowed as he lifted a metallic form. It was unmistakably that of a slugthrower. I had seen the same model being carried by a few of the enthusiasts in the Warhost. Most stuck with the blaster weaponry provided by the Orian Authority. Had it been the Authority that was responsible though? Thinking back, perhaps it had been the Orian Warhost that ruled and dealt with such logistics. Between Authorities, Empires, Warhosts and other bodies, it was confusing. If I were honest with myself, even with the revelation that the government was run by those damned ‘space wizards’ as people so deridingly called them when when outside of earshot, I wasn’t entirely sure who was responsible for what part of the supply chain. One thing that I can say about the local government: it is certainly not like back in the TIE Corps.

“I carry a weapon with myself at all times. I find the DE-21 to a dependable side arm and it is a touch more graceful than a blaster.”

“Oh?” I felt my eyes narrow. “Are you one of those purists who prefer the more graceful and civilized ways of killing each other?”

This question brought the hint of a grim smile to the man’s face. “I can assure you that there will be nothing graceful about this day if we don’t do something about those monsters.” He motioned toward the corpse of a Devaronian clad in stormtrooper armor with the tip of the weapon. “If you are in need of a weapon just now, I am sure you could find something from the dead.”

 I felt a shudder run through me. I had already seen several troopers and civilians alike torn apart by these hellish hounds. Perhaps ‘hellish’ wasn’t the right name for them, but they seemed more specter than flesh most of the time. I had seen their teeth tear into the innocent. That had been enough to drive me here.

The old man seemed to recognize my internal conflict. Or perhaps he had just seen me shudder. I wasn’t sure which, but a mixture of concern and suspicion. There was a tiredness to his gaze. I could see he held a deep pain.

“Well, if our end is here,” I spoke the words with a slow numbness, “let’s at least die trying to get word to the rest of the Sadowans so that maybe they can stop this threat.”

I could see the wheels of thought turning in head of the old force user. It was like he was looking into a mosaic that extended far beyond anything that mortal eyes could glimpse. He nodded at first in slow acceptance, and then he started to nod more vigorously. I could see his lips moving silently as he extended a hand toward sight unseen. Then, he turned his head to look me hard in the eyes.

“We will fight to the last. We will make it back." There was a madness to his gaze and his words. It made me want to recoil. ”At least one of us will survive this day. I have seen it.”

I wish I could have felt his confidence at that moment. At this rate, I was mostly hoping I would live long enough to see the end of the day.