**Summit Block**

**Taldryan Citadel**

**Chyron**

On returning from their recon mission, Rakhai and Andrelious were summoned straight into a meeting with the Consul. The rest of Taldryan’s summit were preparing for the pending Unchained attack.

“We’ll keep this brief, gentlemen, because right now, we don’t have time. You saw the size of the enemy fleet,” Erinyes began.

“The number of troopers aboard those Gamma-class ships could completely overwhelm your army. Especially given your insistence on wasting resources on the move to Ostara,” Andrelious stated, not hiding his disdain at the Consul’s plans.

“I want the two of you to head to the *Axios*. Admiral Habska wants to engage the Unchained fleet directly,” the Zeltron explained.

“Ah yes, Habska. As much as I disagree with how much independence you’ve given to the armed forces, you’ve at least got the navy in capable hands. I will head for the *Axios* at once,” Inahj declared, moving out of the room surprisingly fast for a man of his rotund frame.

“I want you to keep watching him, Rakhai. His loyalty is to his family.” Erinyes ordered.

Rakhai nodded and followed his fellow Sith out of the room.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

“My Lord, we’ve run the IFF codes of the two enemy TIE Defenders that performed the recon sweep,” Captain Morstsand stated, handing the cloaked figure a datapad.

“Looks like one of them was just from one of Taldryan’s squadrons. But the other one, *Sharpshoot II*, that one is of interest to us, Captain. *Sharpshoot II* is the personal fighter of one Andrelious Inahj,” the Twi’lek answered.

“Inahj? I’m afraid I don’t know the name.” Morstsand said.

The female grinned, but her expression only served to chill Morstsand to the bones. “Our intelligence records suggested he’d left the Caelus system some time ago. Now he’s evidently working with Taldryan again. I don’t have time to give you his background, but let’s just say, he’s top of the list of people that we can turn.”

“What makes you think he’d turn? From what I’ve seen of this so-called Clan Taldryan, they seem loyal to each other,” the Captain queried.

“It’s simple, Captain. You have children, don’t you?”

“Two sons, my Lord. What does that have to do with anything?”

“And how far would you go to make sure they were safe?”

“I’d lay my own life on the line if I had to,”

“We’ve learned a few things about our enemy, Captain. One of the things we’ve learned, most of Taldryan itself are outcasts and misfits. Such people don’t tend to have families. Inahj is different. We don’t know exactly where they’re living, but he has three small children. We know that they’re living *somewhere* in the Caelus system, but we don’t know exactly where. Just that the Inahj family do not live on Chyron or Ostara,”

“I think I understand, my Lord. You’re going to try to find them and use them as leverage,” Morstsand announced.

“We will also need to get Inahj aboard the *Aleema*, Captain. You and your crew do that, and I’ll worry about finding the family,” the female ordered.

**Inahj Homestead**

**Elysia**

Parck and Licon Inahj were finding their grandchildren a handful. The twins had spent the last hour squabbling over which holo to watch, while Mostynn wouldn’t stop attempting to lift things with the Force.

“Grandpa cards fly!” Mostynn chuckled, scattering Parck’s sabacc deck.

“Who wants one of my special hot chocolates?” Licon asked.

The three children cheered and moved towards the kitchen, hoping to be allowed to help their grandmother make the beverage.

The household’s holotable lit up, announcing an incoming call.

Parck accepted the call, not surprised to find his son on the other end.

“Dad. No time to explain, I need you to hide the house. Tell mum to keep her lightsaber nearby. And don’t let *ANYONE* in,” Andrelious stated, his tone serious.

Although he was not Force sensitive, Parck Inahj could sense Andrelious’ anxiety.

“Should I tell the girls anything?” the elder Inahj asked.

“No need. Just keep them safe,” Andrelious explained, terminating the call before his father could say anything else.

**Admiral’s Ready Room**

***Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer *Axios***

“Care to join us, Andrelious?” Captain Chella Orsonn teased as the diminutive Sith entered the ready room.

“I have my priorities, Chel…Captain Orsonn. As I am sure that the rest of you have yours. Admiral Habska, how is the situation looking?” Andrelious asked, studying the two holographic fleets carefully.

“In short, not good. We’re outnumbered and outgunned. We’ve got them matched in heavier ships, but they’ve got twice as many Raider corvettes. It’s going to be a tall order to hold them off. Not to mention that their fighters are First Order models. Mostly TIE/FO, but there’s a fair few squadrons of TIE/SF in the mix,” the Admiral explained.

“Alright. I can see that you’re planning on sending the entire naval force in. I think that’s a good call. I expect that the enemy will attempt to bring the *Orthanc* down first, so that they can escape if things go wrong,” Inahj responded.

“We’ll keep the *Orthanc* as far out of range as its gravity wells allow. *Revenant* and *Karufr’s Dawn* will cover her, along with *Renegade* to provide anti-starfighter cover. The rest of the fleet will flank *Axios*.” Habska stated.

“I’m going to take leadership of the fighter screen. Well, along with Rakhai. Our priority targets will be the enemy TIE/SFs, along with trying to reduce the number of Raiders. I’m also aware that we’re not facing the entire Unchained force. There’s at least one more *Victory*-class in reserve, so there’s a chance that we’ll be facing reinforcements,” Andrelious declared.

“Captain Orsonn, get your senior staff briefed. I’m going to speak to the Captains of the rest of the fleet,” the Admiral ordered.

“Sir, what of the reports of troop ships headed for Chyron and Ostara?” Orsonn asked.

“Our job is to neutralise their fleet, Captain. We just have to have faith that our Army can hold the invasions off,” Habska responded.

“Don’t forget they’ll have the bulk of the Clan’s Force users backing them up, Admiral. You should know by now not to underestimate the power of the Force,” Andrelious said. “Anyway, looks like we all know what we’re doing. I’ll go and speak to the TIE pilots,”

**Hangar Bay**

With the TIE pilots of the *Axios* briefed of exactly what Andrelious expected of them, the Sith climbed into his personal TIE Defender, *Sharpshoot II*. For the upcoming battle, Inahj had arranged for his fighter’s usual concussion missile launchers to be swapped for heavy rockets. Having noticed a complete lack of bombers among the Taldryan navy, the Sith elected to carry some anti-capital ship warheads himself. He had also requested that three of the Taldryan fleet’s squadrons be outfitted as such, even as unsuited as TIE Defenders were for bombing duty. He hoped that such a tactic would catch the Unchained off guard;

Andrelious felt the *Axios* de-hyper from the microjump it and the rest of the fleet had taken to quickly reach the location of the Unchained fleet. The decision had been taken to intercept the enemy before they could get too close to Perune and its moons, mainly to prevent the potential devastation of an orbital bombardment.

“All TIEs, you are clear to launch. Good hunting!” Andrelious announced as his fighter was released from its launching rack. Rakhai was fast on his tail, with each of the six squadrons launching in formation.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

“Captain! Enemy ships have exited hyperspace!” an officer cried out from somewhere in one of the command pits.

“Confirmed, sir. We’ve got an ImpStar Deuce and support vessels closing in on an attack vector,” another officer declared.

“Looks like they’ve brought their Interdictor…” Morstsand commented, squinting out of the viewport to attempt to identify the composition of the Taldryan fleet.

“Interdictor confirmed! Our hyperdrive’s safety systems have engaged. We won’t be able to jump until we’ve broken their interdiction field!”

**Bridge**

***Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer *Axios***

“Captain Breznak, stay as far back as possible. *Revenant and Karufr’s Dawn* will keep the enemy off you!” Admiral Habska ordered.

“Aye aye sir!” Breznak responded, his hologram disappearing as he confirmed his orders.

“All TIEs are airborne, sir! Commander Inahj confirms all twenty squadron leaders are in theatre!”

Habska and Orsonn leant out of the viewport, watching as the squadrons of the Taldryan starfighter corps sped towards the enemy.

“Captain, if we don’t make it out alive….” the Admiral began.

“Sir, I have faith. The *Axios* is more powerful than anything they’ve got. And I’d bet they don’t have anyone as good as Andrel flying for them. We will be fine,” Orsonn responded coolly.

**-x-**

Andrelious, along with Rakhai, were among the first of the Taldryan pilots to come into range of the enemy’s laser cannons. Almost as soon as the first few laser bursts filled the sky, the two Sith were entering a series of evasive manoeuvres as the two groups of TIEs scattered.

“Pick your targets and stick to them. And watch out for the Special Forces TIEs. They have a rear turret!” Andrelious warned as he targeted the nearest enemy TIE. With a brief glance at a couple of his cockpit instruments, and an even briefer look at the picture of his children attached to the corner of his targeting computer, the Sith squeezed the trigger on his flight yoke to wrap up his first kill of the day.

Banking away from the small cloud of debris, Andrelious grimaced as he watched a TIE Defender get too close to the rear of a Special Forces TIE and get turned into slag by the rear turret.

“Tornado and Halberd squadrons, my sensors read three squadrons of TIE Bombers have entered the fray. They’re most likely going to try and deal with the *Orthanc* first! Don’t let them get near to your command ship!” Inahj ordered.

The battle continued to intensify as the *Raider* Corvettes and DP20 Gunships moved close enough to start firing on enemy starfighters. Green hyphens of energy sped through the void, testing the ability of every single pilot that was taking part in what was likely to prove a critical skirmish between the two rival groups.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

Sazita Krea had been deep in meditation when the Taldryan fleet had begun its attack, but quickly rushed to the *Aleema*’s bridge as soon as the alert klaxons sounded. Although she was the most high-ranking member of the Unchained aboard the Star Destroyer, her lack of military knowledge meant she had left Morstsand in command of the battle. She had other, more important things to worry about.

“Lieutenant Jitte, is the enhanced tractor beam ready?” the Sith asked an unusually willowy officer.

“Uh, yes, my Lord, I programmed the last of the special algorithms personally. It should be able to get a solid lock on anything that comes into range,” Jitte explained, trying and failing to hide his fear of the Twi’lek.

Krea smirked. “It had better work, Lieutenant. Otherwise I’ll find a new experiment for you to conduct. Probably something involving how long one can survive in space. Without a spacesuit.”

The Lieutenant gulped, praying to whatever deity he believed in that his algorithms would be enough. All he had been told was to enhance the tractor beam for a particularly evasive target.

“Captain Morstsand. Initiate procedure Aurek Jenth Isk. You know what to do,” Sazita ordered.

Morstsand saluted and opened a comms channel. “Gamma squadron, find the TIE Defender whose IFF identifies it as *Sharpshoot II*. Draw it away from the rest of the battle,”

“But sir there’s over a hundred enemy fighters. You want a whole squadron to lure a SINGLE ONE of them away?” a voice, belonging to Gamma’s commander, replied.

“Those are your orders, Gamma leader. And one last thing. Do not destroy *Sharpshoot II*. No matter how many of your squadron he slaughters,” Morstsand commanded.

“Your pilots alone won’t be enough. I need to speak with him,” Krea announced, stalking out of the bridge before anyone could offer any kind of reply.

**-x-**

Andrelious had elected to take the attack to the enemy *Raider* corvettes, having already witnessed nearly an entire squadron’s worth of allies fall victim to their specialised anti-starfighter weaponry. The Sith did not wish to waste his rockets on the corvettes, so his only option was to chip away at their shields with his laser cannons, a strategy that was sure to test his piloting ability to its limit.

*Strange*. *The way the enemy Raiders are moving, something about it just doesn’t seem natural*. Andrelious thought as he began to spiral in towards his chosen target, whose IFF codes identified it as the *Sion*. He fired his lasers whenever his instruments indicated he had a solid lock, his shots dissipating as they collided with the corvette’s shields. Nevertheless, as his targeting systems confirmed, Inahj was slowly but surely weaking the *Sion*’s shields.

“I could do with some assistance over here! We need to take the *Raider* corvettes down!” Andrelious yelled.

Turning his back to his target to gain some distance for another strafing run, the Sith was distracted for a moment by an unfamiliar voice echoing inside his head.

*Inahj!*

“*Axios*, was that you?” Andrelious questioned, sure that the voice must have come from his comm system.

“What do you mean, commander?” Habska replied.

“Never mind, Admiral!” Inahj replied.

*It must just have been one of our pilots.* the Sith reasoned.

As he turned to face the *Sion* again, Andrelious smiled as he saw three other TIEs attacking the corvette. He kept one eye on his targeting system, confirming that the *Sion*’s shields had failed. With the flick of one his cockpit switches, the former Imperial activated his ion cannons. As he fired, he noticed his allies had done the same. It took a dozen bursts to fully disable the *Sion*, leaving it stranded and completely vulnerable to further enemy fire.

“Leave it alone for now! We may want prisoners later!” Andrelious ordered, himself already targeting an enemy TIE.

*Andrelious. We don’t need to be your enemy.*

The same voice from before again tried to get the Sith’s attention. He still couldn’t recognise it, nor could he place it from its rather exotic sounding accent.

The lead ships of both fleets were now within turbolaser range. *Axios* and *Aleema* started to exchange fire, their large number of weapon batteries aiming straight for each other. *Axios*, the more powerful of the two Star Destroyers, spread its fire across other enemy ships, focusing in particular on the *Vowrawn*, arguably the second most dangerous ship of the enemy fleet.

Meanwhile, Andrelious was finding his latest target to be a little more challenging than his previous kills. Not only was the enemy piloting seemingly able to evade most of his shots, but its rear turret made for a much trickier time. It was also retreating towards the *Aleema*, forcing Inahj to head into the heart of the enemy fleet where he would be exposed to the turbolasers of the enemy capital ships.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

“Lieutenant Jitte, engage tractor beam on target *Sharpshoot II.*” Captain Morstsand commanded.

“At once, sir!” Jitte answered, tapping at a number of buttons that did not quite fit in with the rest of the consoles on the bridge of the *Aleema*.

The Lieutenant allowed himself a smile as the tractor beam almost immediately grabbed hold of the enemy TIE Defender.

**-x-**

Andrelious wrestled wildly with his flight yoke but could not seem to get any kind of response from his TIE Defender. It had been a long time since he had been caught by an enemy tractor beam, but his years of experience had allowed him to pick up quite a few tricks. He tried everything, from cutting his ship’s power, to discharging a warhead to break the tractor beam’s focus, but nothing he tried gave him any joy.

“*Axios,* the enemy have me in a tractor beam. I am being pulled into the hangar,” Andrelious announced as his TIE got ever closer to the enemy command ship.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer *Axios***

Admiral Habska tried his best to remain calm, but the enemy’s move to capture Andrelious had caught him by surprise. Given that the Unchained had shown no interest in anything other than completely destroying Taldryan, the idea that any of them would be captured hadn’t occurred to the Admiral.

“Sir, we should inform Consul Ténama at once,” Captain Orsonn stated, her face betraying her obvious concern for Andrelious.

“Get me a priority channel. I shall inform her myself,” Habska ordered.

**Summit Block**

**Taldryan Citadel**

**Chyron**

The situation on Chyron was critical. Even with the moon’s defences having shot several of the enemy dropships down before they could land, enough had got through to pose a serious threat to Chyron. Crimson armoured stormtroopers were making their way through the city streets, and were being met by divisions of Taldryan’s army, backed up by many Taldryan Force users.

Seraine Ténama was doing her best to coordinate the defensive effort from the Citadel, but with the rest of her summit directly involved in the fighting, she was seriously considering joining the fray herself. She was certainly not expecting to receive a call from Admiral Habska.

“Admiral. Surely you can’t have defeated the enemy fleet already?” the Consul asked.

“I’m afraid not. We’ve had a complication. The *Aleema* just captured commander Inahj,” Habska announced.

Erinyes’ face fell. The news that Andrelious was now aboard the enemy Star Destroyer was among the worst things that she could have heard.

“Thank you, Admiral. I’m going to handle this personally. Keep our forces fighting. If you can, try and keep a lid on the fact that Andrelious is captured,” the Zeltron ordered.

“Personally? I don’t think that’s a good idea…” the Admiral responded, more out of duty than out of thinking he’d actually be able to dissuade the Consul.

“You do your job, Admiral. I will do mine,” Erinyes snapped back, a little more harshly than she’d have liked.

**Hangar Bay**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

Having lost his battle against the enemy tractor beam, Andrelious was powerless to resist as his immobilised TIE was locked into a launching rack. He could see a sizeable number of Unchained stormtroopers gathering in the hangar bay, certainly far too many for him to take on. As he watched, a cloaked figure entered the area, flanked by two men in Imperial style uniforms.

With little in the way of options, Andrelious opened his ship’s hatch and climbed out, making sure to keep his hands well away from his lightsabers. The stormtroopers nevertheless pointed the barrels of their rifles in Inahj’s direction, ensuring he’d try nothing.

“You. Hand your weapons over, now,” one of the officers demanded.

“He’s not going to start anything, Lieutenant. Andrelious, welcome to the *Aleema*,” the cloaked figure stated. Andrelious immediately recognised the voice as the one that had tried to speak to him a few minutes earlier.

“Cram the pleasantries. I want to know exactly who you are and what in the name of Palpatine you want with me!” Andrelious hissed.

“Interesting that you mention the former Emperor. As for who I am, let’s discuss that over a glass or two of something,” the figure responded.

“My Lord, we need to contain the prisoner. He’s responsible for four kills in the last half hour alone. Not to mention that we think he’s behind the disappearance of the expedition we sent to Elysia,” the second officer commented.

“For now, he’s *MY* guest. That means you treat him the same way you treat me. Do you understand me?” the female stated, patting the lightsaber clipped onto her cloak.

Andrelious did not know what to say. Since his return to Taldryan, events had been dominated by the ongoing clash with the Unchained. They had even been the reason he’d come back from his extended absence, having been snooping around his home on Elysia. Quite why the female who appeared to be in charge of the group was so interested in him was yet to be seen, but with little chance of escaping his current situation, he was sure to find out soon.

The cloaked female gestured towards a turbolift. “If you’d care to join me…” she said, her hand making a beckoning motion at Andrelious.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer *Axios***

Admiral Habska did not want to admit it, but the capture of Andrelious had definitely affected the morale of some of his forces. The fighter screen, which had nominally been under Inahj’s command, was hit particularly hard as it was not immediately clear who was supposed to take charge. Habska was a little surprised that Rakhai, another of Taldryan’s Force users, had not stepped up to the mantle, but there was no time to discuss such things.

“This is *Relentless!* Our shields are starting to buckle!”

“Hold position, *Relentless*,” Habska ordered. The Admiral needed every one of his ships to carry on fighting, even if it meant losses.

“Sir, one of the enemy Vindicators just lost its shields,” Captain Orsonn announced, pointing at the offending vessel through the viewport. “Its IFF transponder identifies it as the *Ulic Qel-Droma*,”

“All ships, concentrate fire on the Vindicator *Ulic Qel-Droma*!” the Admiral commanded, noting the fact that the ship shared a heritage with part of Taldryan’s great rivals, Clan Arcona.

**Sazita Krea’s personal quarters**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

Andrelious was watching events continue to unfold around him through one of the large transparisteel windows. He grimaced as he recognised the shields failing aboard one of his Clan’s *Victory*-class vessels, even if he couldn’t remember just which one it was.

“So you’ve clearly got a lot of questions for me. Why don’t you peel yourself away from the chaos out there and come and try some of this brandy? I might even tell you how much the bottle’s worth if you ask nicely,” Inahj’s would-be host stated, pouring the dark brown substance into a pair of expensive looking glasses.

“I think we’ll start with your name. You’ve still not told me,” Andrelious replied, still very uncertain of the woman’s intentions.

“I usually prefer to be addressed as ‘My Lord’, but the fools aboard this ship aren’t like us. They can’t touch the Force. That’s what makes me and you so special, Andrelious. That’s what gives us the right to rule,”

“So are you going to actually TELL me anything, or are you just going to keep talking in riddles?” Inahj questioned, grasping one of the brandy glasses gently.

“My name is Sazita. Sazita Krea. My name is the only thing that they couldn’t take from me….” Krea declared, suddenly sounding wistful.

“Who?” Andrelious asked.

“When I was twelve, my parents and I were travelling to Coruscant. Before we could even jump to hyperspace, our ship was ambushed. We were boarded by slavers. Happens a lot to my people,” Sazita explained, lowering the hood of her cloak.

Andrelious had already figured out that Krea was not Human, but he’d not quite established exactly what species she was a member of. On seeing her tattooed lekku, he instantly identified her as a Twi’lek.

“Is this when you tell me that you discovered you could use the Force and killed them?” Andrelious questioned.

“Not exactly. My father tried to buy them off. My mother? She tried to FIGHT them off. To put things simply, the slavers ended up with two corpses and one young girl. I spent the next decade being bought and sold. I don’t think I need to explain the kind of jobs that a Twi’lek slave girl is subjected to?” Sazita asked.

“You do not. I know what people can be like. Most don’t need much of an excuse to exploit those that they see as weaker,” Andrelious replied. “But as we seem to be talking about you, what happened next?”

“I’d been a slave for eleven years when this super rich businessman bought me. Would you believe I was bought as a gift for his son? That little bastard only had one thing in mind for me. That was when I realised that you can only ever rely on one person…yourself,” Krea explained.

“I’m not so sure about that one. I’m pretty sure I can rely on my parents. And if it came to it, my children,” the Human stated.

“We aren’t all so lucky to have a family!” Sazita shouted, her eyes glinting yellow. “I haven’t brought you into my *PRIVATE* quarters so you can sit here and sneer at me!”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. I can only imagine how horrible the slave life must have been for you,” Andrelious babbled, clearly afraid of what the female might do to him.

“Now you see, this is why I took an interest in you, my dear Andrel. You’ve done your absolute best to conceal your past from everyone. Even my men in the SRI couldn’t find anything on you. Your eldest daughter is quite the slicer, isn’t she?” the Twi’lek questioned, calmer but still visibly annoyed.

Andrelious downed his brandy. “She has also completely disappeared from my life as suddenly as she arrived in it. For all I know, she could be dead, even if I haven’t felt anything through the Force,” Inahj said simply. Saskia’s apparent disappearance had bothered the Sith at the time, but he’d quickly resolved that his eldest daughter was simply too independent minded to value her family.

Sazita finished her own drink and re-filled both glasses. “So I went for a more delicate approach. I had my spies ask about you. Seems you’re quite popular with Taldryan’s military. Nobody knew too much, but once I started to piece the little bits of information I could get together, I was able to start to figure you out. And of course, I know where your loyalties lie. You don’t quite gel with the whole Brotherhood within a Brotherhood that Taldryan claims to espouse. Your loyalty is with your family. With Poppy, Etty and Mostynn.”

The mention of his children’s names worried Andrelious. Just how much did this woman know about him and his family? Was the location of their home, currently hidden in the Elysian mountains, no longer the secret it once was? Most worryingly, who were Krea’s people? Who had they been talking to?

“I know something else, too. You claim you’re this all powerful Sith. But answer me this. Why is it that you’ve spent a large part of life under the thumb of various women?” Sazita challenged.

*That’s what this is about. It’s ALWAYS about a powerful woman trying to use me. Granta, Susan, Kooki. And now this Twi’lek!* Inahj mused.

Krea giggled. “Perhaps you allow yourself to be used. Perhaps you enjoy it. I mean, not many men would agree to be some cantina owner’s personal whore. How much *DID* you drink that night, anyway?”

“Wait a second. The only people who even knew about the, er, arrangement I came to with Susan were me, her, Saskia and Kooki. Well, and that bounty hunter who Susan hired to ‘retrieve’ me after Saskia was born, but I doubt she told him all that much,” Andrelious commented.

“For once I didn’t even need to torture him. A few thousand credits and I found out all he knew about the sad story of Susan Ortega. Not much about you, apart from that so-called arrangement,” Sazita explained.

“Anyway, that aside, you should understand that none of those women are anything to do with me anymore. I’ve not seen Granta in a while, Susan is dead, and Kooki, she’s gone. I don’t need any of them,” Inahj stated.

“I think it’s about time I started to explain exactly what my plans are,” the female declared.

“That’s obvious. You’re trying to wipe Taldryan out. Something about not being true Sith. I won’t admit that I’m not curious as to what you mean,” Andrelious replied.

“We don’t have to wipe you out. Not if you’ll renounce your beliefs and take your place in our reborn Sith Empire. Unfortunately a lot of the clan will never agree, and that’s even before you take into account that there’s a large number who are wholly unsuitable anyway,” Krea responded.

“Unsuitable? What do you mean?” Inahj demanded.

“The present Taldryan leadership have already shown that they intend to resist us. And then there is the membership that will never be willing to follow the ways of the Sith. Such people cannot be tolerated if we are to succeed,”

“There won’t be many of us left. We’d never be able to keep control of the Caelus system, especially with the leadership gone,” Andrelious noted.

“That’s where you come in. We’d install you as Governor of the system. Of course, I have other uses for you. Tell me something, Andrelious. Have you ever laid with a woman of another species?” Sazita questioned, her hand suddenly grasping one of Andrelious’.

It was now becoming clear to Inahj exactly what the Twi’lek wanted from him. The comments about his previous relationships had been disturbing, and now the female was seemingly offering more than a simple alliance.

*What is it with me and strong women?* Inahj thought to himself.

**-x-**

Unchained and Taldryan starfighters continued their attempts to whittle each other’s numbers down as the two fleets exchanged an endless barrage of turbolaser fire.

Fires burned throughout the smaller ships as their shields failed under the constant attacks, and damage control crews did their best to extinguish the blazes.

The bridges of the two command ships, the *Axios* and the *Aleema*, were as frantic as they’d ever been.

Towards the rear of the action, half a dozen TIE/sa Bombers had managed to make their way through the action, their target the Taldryan Interdictor *Orthanc*. Many of their wingmates had been picked off, but their leader, callsign Beta One, was among the survivors.

“Beta group, we’re in range, let’s take down that Interdictor!” Beta One ordered, his targeting systems already beginning to acquire a lock on the enemy cruiser.

“This is seven, enemy fire is too intens-“ a female voice screamed, cut short as her bomber was cut to pieces by the corvette *Renegade.*

Beta One slammed his cockpit panel in frustration. The victory that he and his squadron had been promised was becoming more and more costly as the battle continued to unfold.

**Bridge**

***Imperial-II* class Star Destroyer *Axios***

“This is *Orthanc*! Enemy bombers made it through the fighter screen and are heading right for us!” Captain Breznak’s voice announced over the special comm system reserved for Admiral Habska and his ship captains.

“We should divert some fighters to cover the *Orthanc*,” Captain Orsonn suggested.

“We simply don’t have the numbers to do that, Captain. With the number of TIE Bombers they’ve already lost, what’s left will probably not be enough to do the job,” Habska replied.

“Admiral, our scope indicates that the Consul’s ship is heading towards the enemy command ship!” somebody called out from the command pits.

“What’s she doing? That’s suicide!” Habska complained.

“I don’t know for sure, sir, but I think she might be trying to get Andrel back,” Orsonn commented.

**Sazita Krea’s personal quarters**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

Andrelious was trying to avoid the awkward situation by turning his attention once more to the battle raging outside. He could now see that both sides were starting to take more losses. The nearest *Vindicator* cruiser was now little more than a flaming wreck, but it was still somehow able to fire a few of its turbolaser turrets.

“I’ll let you into a secret, my dear. We’re not losing anything like the number of men you’d think. A lot of our ships are partly automated. The *Raider* corvettes are actually completely automated. Not as single soul aboard those! They’re not quite as efficient as a regular crew, not yet anyway, but we’ve still not quite managed to sort out our manpower situation. Do you think the Taldryan military will accept you as their leader? My intelligence reports suggest that you’re one of the more popular Force users when it comes to the military. As I’d expect, given your background,” Krea stated.

“You seem to be so sure that I will help you. I still have my lightsabers. I could just kill you, right now, and then slaughter whatever passes for a command crew aboard this ship,” Andrelious snapped back.

“But if you were going to do that, you’d have tried already. And you’d have failed. I didn’t get to where I am today without spilling a lot of blood myself. Rest assured, Andrelious, if you choose to resist me, you will soon learn that there will be a price to pay. I’m making you a very generous offer. Full control over this star system. A place by my side as my own powerbase grows. Now, let’s up the ante a little, shall we?” the Twi’lek said.

Sazita moved closer to Andrelious and reached inside the sheath on his outfit that contained his datapad. She quickly connected it to a nearby dataport.

“Excuse me?” the male stated, attempting to retrieve his device. The Twi’lek just slapped his hand away.

“You can have it back in a minute. Now, let’s see what happens if I connect this spike kit with it,” Krea giggled. “Oh look, full access. Looks like that slicer I paid for was worth the fee,”

“I’m going to have to ask that you stop that at once,” Andrelious demanded, his right hand starting to move towards his silver-hilted lightsaber.

Sazita was suddenly on her feet, towering above the sitting Human. Balling her right hand into a fist, she punched Inahj in the face, the force of the blow knocking him to the floor.

“You’ll get more of that if you don’t start doing as you’re told!” the female yelled, her calm demeanour completely melting away.

“I see you’ve picked up plenty from your old slave masters,” Andrelious stated, clutching where Sazita had attacked him.

The Twi’lek sneered at her guest. “Those who have power need to demonstrate that power over those under them. That’s been the way for millennia. Let’s just hope you don’t show the need to be corrected again,”

Inahj was beginning to detest the woman, but the speed and power behind the punch also left him fearful of exactly what Sazita was capable of. Even though he’d only met members of the *Aleema*’s crew briefly he had sensed the fear that the Twi’lek instilled in her men.

Andrelious quietly sat back in his chair, already feeling an uncomfortable swelling around his left eye.

“I really wish you didn’t make me do that. It spoils your looks,” Sazita commented as she examined the black eye she’d caused.

Inahj continued to remain silent as he finished his drink.

“Anyway, seeing as you’re just going to sit there and sulk, I’ll get back to what I was doing. You see, my dear, it quickly became obvious just how I could get you onside. After all, every man does have his price. It’s just yours was proving most difficult. Until now…” the Twi’lek said, grinning as she read something on the screen.

Andrelious was immediately filled with dread.

**Inahj Homestead**

**Elysia**

Parck and Licon Inahj had never quite got used to the idea of a house that could completely conceal itself from view. Their grandchildren, however, hadn’t even seemed to notice.

“The worst bit about all this is we don’t even know what’s going on out there,” Parck said.

“I see that as a good thing. All we need to do is keep these three safe. Andrel is out there, doing whatever he needs to. And as long as the house is hidden we-“

Licon was cut off as a console buzzed loudly. She and her husband craned their necks round to see if they could ascertain why the alarm was sounding, but moments later it became clear as the windows started to become uncovered.

“Looks like it’s all sorted, anyway. Andrel’s obviously just opened the house. He can do it from his datapad,” Licon explained.

“Lights go off! House back!” Mostynn giggled.

**Sazita Krea’s personal quarters**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

“That slicer was worth every single credit I paid. You see, Andrelious, I have the money to hire the best. If I could just get control of a few populated systems, I can properly fill the ranks. Droids and computers have their place, but there’s nothing like having power over a fellow organic. Over lots of fellow organics,” Sazita stated.

“Leave them alone!” Andrelious hissed as he saw what the woman had done.

“Well you’d best do as I say, then, hadn’t you?” Krea snapped back, pressing a button on a nearby commsystem.

“Captain Morstsand, I will be sending you a set of coordinates. Have an army squad diverted to those coordinates on the ice moon. Local name is Elysia,” the Twi’lek ordered.

“Of course, my Lord. It will be done at once. In fact I was about to contact you myself,” the Captain answered, his servile tone disgusting Andrelious.

“What is it, Captain? I’m very busy at the moment.”

“There is a VT-49 Decimator headed straight for us. Its IFF codes suggest that it’s the personal ship of the enemy leader. What would you have us do?” Morstsand questioned.

“Consul. The enemy leader calls herself their Consul,” Krea stated, allowing herself another smile at Andrelious.

“Alright. And what do you want to do with this Consul?”

“If you can, tractor her ship into our hangar. Then keep the entire flight deck clear. She is an incredibly dangerous individual, Captain,” Sazita stated, cutting the Captain off before he could offer any further reply. “I couldn’t have devised a better test myself. Looks like your Consul’s on her way to retrieve you. Unfortunately for her, it’s already too late,” she continued, offering a hand to Andrelious.

There was very little that Inahj could do. The Twi’lek’s presence in the Force alone gave him pause, and with his home’s location revealed, the safety of Andrelious’ children was now also in Krea’s hands.

Inahj resignedly accepted the offered hand, and was quickly pulled to his feet.

“Just one last thing before we meet your Consul,” Sazita declared. Andrelious started to open his mouth to reply, but found himself shoved into the nearest wall. The female, pinning Inahj’s arms to the wall, initiated an aggressive kiss, sliding her tongue into Andrelious’ mouth. She kept their lips locked together for what seemed an eternity to the Taldryanite, who felt no attraction towards the alien female.

“That’s just a little taste of what I can do,” Sazita purred. “You’ll see more of it once we’ve dealt with Ténama!”

**-x-**

The leader of Spectre squadron was among the better pilots in the Taldryan navy’s starfighter corps, a fact he had proven with 4 kills in the ongoing skirmish with the Unchained. By his reckoning half of his squadron had been picked off by the enemy, but as the battle wore on it became increasingly more difficult to keep track.

Spectre were one of the squadrons that had been nominated to carry heavy rockets into the fray but the chance to utilise them against the enemy capital ships had not presented itself, and with the battle raging on, it had been the Taldryan fleet that was tasked with doing the damage to the enemy’s larger vessels.

“Spectre Lead, change of plan. I need an immediate attack on the enemy flagship. Take out its shields, but do not destroy it,” Admiral Habska ordered.

“At once, sir!” the pilot answered, before pushing the button that allowed him to speak to the rest of his squadron.

“Spectre, go for the shield towers on the enemy flagship!”

**Bridge**

***Immobilizer 418*-class Heavy Cruiser *Orthanc***

The bridge of the *Orthanc* in many ways resembled that of the *Axios*, albeit on a smaller scale. With the ship involved in combat the whole bridge was a hive of activity, shouting, and even a small amount of panic. Despite its position at the rear of the Taldryan formation, the *Orthanc* was finding itself under heavy fire. Its Captain, Herktor Breznak, a long serving veteran of the Taldryan navy, did his best to remain absolutely calm even as chaos reigned.

“Sir! The shields won’t take much more punishment!” somebody shouted.

“Hold position. Inform Doctor Mees-Rogg that his sickbay will soon be getting very busy!” Breznak commanded. His orders were clear: the *Orthanc* was to utilise its gravity well projectors to prevent the Unchained fleet from hypering away.

**Mountain Range**

**Near Inahj homestead**

**Elysia**

“Why did they send us here?” a crimson armour clad stormtrooper complained, his armour not enough to insulate his body from Elysia’s bitterly cold climate.

“I thought the coldest I’d felt was when that psychotic Twi’lek inspected our unit,” another moaned.

“She better not find out that you called her that. And stop questioning orders. Good soldiers follow orders!” the lead trooper, designation LK-191 snapped, her men’s grumbling only adding to her own bad mood.

“We’re nearly at the coordinates you specified. Are you going to tell us what’s going on, now?”

The commander frowned under her helmet. “The orders are very clear, and very simple. We are going to storm the house located at those coordinates. Blasters on STUN. I’ve been told that even a single death will result in this whole squad’s immediate execution.”

The team glanced at each other, suddenly feeling very unsure about the mission. Whilst they were in the middle of a large scale battle for control of a star system, detaining civilians who were likely to be no threat made little tactical sense. The fact that these civilians seemed to live in almost complete isolation from the rest of the system also didn’t seem to make sense.

“Do we have any idea exactly who is inside?” one of the troopers queried.

“More than just an idea. We are here for the rest of the Inahj family. The grandfather, first name Parck, and the children will be no threat at all. Just quickly stun them. Be aware that the grandmother, first name Licon, is known to be Force sensitive and to carry a lightsaber. If she resists, you are still not to kill her, even if she scythes down half our squad,” the commander ordered.

“You want us to shoot children?”

“These orders came from the very top. I don’t know why the Inahj family are so important, but the orders state that they must be taken alive. Once we’ve secured them aboard the transport, we are to head straight to the Star Destroyer *Aleema*,” LK-191 explained.

“Alright. Let’s get on with it then. Maybe we can get off this snowball before our blood completely freezes,”

The cadre started to move towards the Inahj homestead, the ongoing blizzard making progress difficult.

“And that is as far as you go today,” somebody said from the front of the group. The commander noticed someone in red armour, but they appeared to be facing the wrong way.

“Who is that? I’ll have you on insubordination if you don’t get moving, soldier!”

“I’m not one of your bucketheads. I am here to tell you that the Inahj family are not to be touched,” the new arrival declared.

“Enemy combatant detected! All troopers fire! We will not be stopped!” LK-191 yelled, reaching for her blaster rifle.

The squad, acting in unison, cocked their blasters.

Appius Wight activated his lightsaber.

**Hangar Bay**

***Imperial-I* class Star Destroyer *Aleema***

Seraine Ténama disembarked from her personal VT-49, flanked by members of the summit guard. The Consul wasn’t exactly sure what kind of reception she would receive, but a completely deserted hangar bay was not something she’d expected at all.

“We’ll stay here. If we try and move any deeper into the ship, they’ll have set up an ambush,” Erinyes announced.

The group did not have to wait long before two cloaked figures exited from the main turbolift. The taller one had pulled their cloak up and could not be identified, but the shorter figure, clinging onto his companion’s arm, was most certainly familiar.

“Andrelious. Stop playing around. You need to get back in your ship and get back into the battle,” Seraine stated.

“He’s staying right where he is. I like him better as arm candy, even if that flight suit looks good on him. As for you, Ténama, you have tried to stand in my way for too long,” Sazita hissed.

“You’ve made a mess of my home. I would ask you to leave, but I think I’d be wasting my breath,” the Zeltron shot back.

“Andrelious, my sweet. Please could you deal with this little incursion? She’s stopping us from getting to our new flagship,” Krea stated.

“Just think about it, Inahj. If you kill me, you’ll make yourself, AND YOUR FAMILY, enemies of Taldryan. We are at war. Please do not make me spell out those consequences,” Erinyes answered.

“Ha! You mean the Inahj family that are being brought here even as we speak? They will get to watch as Andrelious helps me destroy your rotten little Clan,” the Twi’lek laughed.

A smile spread across the Consul’s face. “If I was you, I’d be checking the status of that mission as often as I could, seeing as it’s obviously a high priority for you,” she said.

“You said they’d be here, waiting for us,” Andrelious added, spotting something in Seraine’s expression that suggested she knew more than she was letting on.

“Captain Morstsand, what was the last status of trooper LK-191’s team?” Sazita asked, speaking into her comlink.

“I’m afraid there’s a problem, my Lord. We can’t raise LK-191 or any of her men. She was due back two minutes ago, but we can’t even detect her dropship,” the Captain replied.

A large impact shook the entire Star Destroyer. Even before things returned to normal, klaxons sounded throughout the hangar bay.

“The shields are gone,” Andrelious said, remembering the sound from his Imperial days.

**Bridge**

With the shield generator towers destroyed by a surprise bombing run from Taldryan TIE Defenders, the *Aleema* was now extremely vulnerable to turbolaser fire. The sudden change in fortune had instilled a fair amount of panic into a few of the younger bridge crew members. Captain Morstsand, who was now fearing for his own life after having to report the disappearance of the expedition to Elysia, realised that things were going to start going downhill, fast.

The one saving grace was that the enemy Interdictor, the *Orthanc*, had also been stripped of its shields.

“Fire ion cannons at the *Orthanc!* We’ll try and disable its gravity wells and get the hell out of here!” Morstsand ordered.

**Hangar Bay**

“You see, I don’t know Andrelious all that well. But I already know enough to understand that his family is his entire world. I figured out you’d know that, and that you’d probably find a way to by-pass his home’s security systems. It stands to reason that you’d only send a few troopers, anything else would be overkill for basically abducting a few kids and their grandparents. Such a shame that they ran into Zappius,” Erinyes teased.

“So they’re safe?” Andrelious asked.

“Apparently your mother actually got in on the act. Zappius is trying to get her into Ektrosis,” the Consul explained.

“It doesn’t matter, my dear. I can just send more troops to Elysia. Now are you going to do as I’ve ordered you to do? Surely you don’t need another reminder of what happens to those who disobey me,” Krea seethed.

“My family is staying exactly where they are. In their home. And as for you, Krea, I can imagine exactly what my role would be under your miserable rule. I will not wear your slave collar. I suggest you call off what’s left of your forces, and get the hell out of Taldryan space,” Inahj shouted.

“You insolent little worm!” Sazita roared. She summoned a lightsaber from somewhere in her robes and moved to attack Erinyes, who, having heard the Force scream a warning moments previously, had already activated her own weapon.

The two furious females’ blades met in mid-air in a fantastic shower of sparks, but the would-be conflict was disrupted by another klaxon.

“We need to get out of here! The hull is breaching!” Andrelious shouted. With the two women fully immersed in their fight, he ran towards his Defender, the Force helping him jump to it.

Sazita, finding her opponent to be incredibly skilled with a lightsaber, started to realise that her plans had failed. Attempting to assault Erinyes with a wave of Force lightning, she sprinted away as the Zeltron used her lightsaber to block it. She was already in the turbolift before the Consul could think about giving chase.

“Onto my ship, we’re done here!” Seraine ordered her guard.

**1 hour later**

**Summit Block**

**Taldryan Citadel**

**Chyron**

“Not a total victory, but we’ve certainly given the Unchained a bloody nose. They were able to disable the *Orthanc* and get the *Aleema* and one of their Vindicators away from the battle, but they’ve lost a lot of ships, and even more men, today,” Erinyes stated.

Andrelious simply nodded. Taldryan’s fleet had taken damage, some needing extensive repairs, but the Sith only cared about one thing right now.

His family were safe.

*FIN*