Qormus takes a seat at the table and looks at his data padd.

“Here,” He said to Mirella, also seated at the table, “We finally have our orders.”

Mirella picks up the padd and quickly scanned it, “There isn’t much here, Qormus. I wish we knew more.”

Qormus shrugged, “There isn’t much, no, but that doesn’t matter. We know the target, and where we are to intercept them. The Dread Lord has given us enough to proceed.”

Mirella eyed him for a moment, but she knew he was right. She nodded and handed him the padd.

“I’ll prep the ship.” She said before standing and heading for the exit.

“Mirella, wait."

Mirella turned and waited for Qormus to speak.

Qormus stands and walks over to Mirella, taking her hands in his. He opens himself up to the force to take in the particular flavour of the woman he has devoted himself to.

She senses his probe and smiles, “What do you want, Qormus?” She said looking up at him.

“I love you.” He said and gently kissed her hands.

“And I love you,” She says and reaches up to give him a kiss.

He leaned down to meet her halfway and revelled in her gentle touch and sweet scent.

“Now, we both have work to do.” She said and headed out.

Qormus watched her until she is out of sight before heading to the cockpit. His Imperial Sentry Droid, Scourge, at his terminal, worked busily on the ship's systems.

“What needs to be done before we can go, Scourge?” Qormus asked.

Scourge turned its head near 180 degrees while keeping its body facing the console.

“All power systems are at 100%, and Neophyte Tiran is spooling up the engines. We will be ready to depart in exactly 78 seconds.”

“Scourge, I have told you to call her Mirella.”

“And I have told you that this is inappropriate. Now leave me alone so that I can finalise the ship for departure.”

Qormus sighed, a little annoyed at the droid. The Imperial Sentry Droids were useful, but their personality could be best described as recalcitrant.

“Very well Scourge, instruct the computer to launch once the ship is ready and set a course for the rendezvous,” Qormus said and sits in the pilot’s chair.

“Acknowledged.”

Moments later, the ship lifts off the landing pad and hovers in the air. The bow tilts upwards towards the sky and accelerates. The bright blue sky slowly fades to blackness. It takes several minutes for the vessel to move outside of the planet’s gravity well but before too long the vessel rotates to its intended course. The stars turn into bright lines as the ship enters hyperspace.

“Estimated time of arrival is 4 minutes.”

“Thank you, Scourge.”

Mirella entered the cockpit and takes a set in the co-pilot’s chair.

“Hope I’m not late.” She said, strapping herself into the seat and engaging her console, its lights coming alive in a flurry of activity.

Qormus smiled, “You never are.” He takes this opportunity to strap himself into the chair as well.

From behind them, Scourge said, “Coming out of hyperspace in five, four, three, two, one.”

The star lines return to pinpoints as the ship exits hyperspace.

“Scourge, is there anyone in the vicinity?” Qormus asked.

“Negative.”

Qormus checked his Chrono and reviews the ship's position, “Excellent. Power up the weapons and the tractor beam. Prepare the ship for combat.”

“Acknowledged, Warrior Aquila,” Scourge said.

Qormus feels the change within the ship as the thrum felt through the deck plates increases.

They sit there in silence for several minutes as they wait for their target. Qormus fidgeted in his seat as he waited impatiently.

“Don’t forget Scourge, when the target arrives, don’t engage it until I give the say so. We open fire only when we have confirmation that the Jedi is onboard.” Qormus said looking back at the droid.

“I was at the communications console when the orders arrived. I am well aware of the plan.” The droid responded indignantly.

“Then make sure you follow them,” Qormus said looking back at his console.

Mirella turns to him and chuckles, “You two.” She said, her voice trailing off.

Qormus smiled back at her in return. He opened his mouth to reply but was interrupted by a warning sound. He looks back at his console and then out into space where a ship is drifting just over one kilometre away.

“Here we go, opening a channel.” He said and tapped a button on his console.

“Ascend, this is the shuttle Kormac. We have a delivery for you.” A tinny voice said from the speaker.

Mirella stiffened in her chair which did not go unnoticed. Qormus turned to her and looked at her questioningly. She shook her head, dismissing his attention.

Qormus eyed her for a moment. Something was obviously wrong, he didn’t need the force for that, but they had a job to do, so he turned his attention back out at the newly arrived ship.

“Yes, we have been expecting you. Before we take receipt, we require verification that you possess the cargo and that he is appropriately restrained.”

“Understood Ascend, please wait for one moment while I transmit the verification to you.”

Qormus muted the channel and turned to Mirella, “What is wrong.” He asked her concerned by the haunted look on her face.

She didn’t answer him straight away. He was about to ask her again when she turned to face him.

“The pilot on that vessel, that’s Maloran.”

“What? Are you sure?”

“I know what my brother sounds like Qormus,” She said with pure anguish in her voice.

Qormus knew why. The Kormac was under the impression that they were here to transfer the prisoner to them, but their orders from the Dread Lord were explicit. Once they confirmed the target was on board, they were to destroy the ship and its occupants. Their interest in the Jedi ended with the confirmation of his death. And unfortunately, it meant that everyone on the Kormac, including Mirella's brother, must die.

“I’m sorry Mirella.” He said to her, reaching out to take her hand.

She grasped it, squeezing it tightly. She looked back out at the ship containing her brother, a tear forming at the corner of her eye.

“I know,” She whispered, releasing his hand.

“You can go back to our quarters, Mirella. You don’t need to see this.”

She looked at him fiercely, “Now you listen to me. This is going to be hard, but the Dread Lord gave us this mission, and I intend to see it through. The clan comes first.”

He looked into her eyes. At the resolve evident in them. He could also sense that resolve, the fiery determination to do her job. Accepting her choice, he nodded and turned back to his console, unmuting the channel.

“Ascend, I am sending you verification now.”

Mirella winced when she hears her brother’s voice.

A moment later, a data transmission comes through. It is a live feed of a man, laying on the deck, his hands and feet bound, a blindfold covering much of his face.

Qormus grabbed his padd and compared the image of the target with the bound person on the feed.

“That’s him,” He said quietly, saving a copy to his data padd for later transmission back to Aliso.

“Excellent, Kormac, prepare for transfer,” Qormus said and muted the channel again.

“Scourge, are you ready?” He asked.

“Affirmative,” Was the reply.

Qormus turned to Mirella one more time, but her gaze was fixed on the Kormac, tears streaming down her face. He reached out with the force in an attempt to help calm her.

Sensing it, she looked at him, a look of devastation on her face, “It’s ok, Qormus. I’ll be ok. Just do it quickly, please. Do not let him suffer.”

She closed her eyes and leaned into him as he gently stroked her hair. She took a deep breath and looked back out at the Kormac.

His eyes lingered on her for a moment longer before he returned his attention to the task at hand.

“Scourge, when the vessel lowers it shields, target and fire immediately, then back us off to evade the shockwave.”

“Acknowledged.”

The Kormac began moving towards the Ascend, ostensibly to transfer the cargo. The pilot lowered its shields, and the deck plates thrum with energy as power is kicked into the weapons and engines. The cockpit is suddenly filled with bright yellow light as two torpedos streak towards the Kormac.

“Wait, what’s going …” The voice of Mirella’s brother yelled as the torpedoes struck near the cockpit. The ship exploded spectacularly.

The Ascend, rapidly receding from the wreckage, rocked as the edge of the shockwave caught them but, it quickly subsided as they outpaced the worst of it.

“Ok, that’s far enough Scourge, cut the engines.”

Qormus turned to Mirella, her face lit by the Kormac’s fireball. Her sobs the only sound that could be heard in the cockpit. He undid the straps on his chair and stood up. Kneeling before Mirella, he took her hands in his own, “Mirella, are you ok?” He asked.

She turned to him, her stricken face wet with tears. She slowly shook her head, clearly in shock. Waves of despair rolled off her through the force, lashing Qormus.

He released her hands and undid her straps. He pulled her close to him, and she held onto him tight. She sobbed quietly into his shoulder for several minutes. Her grip on him lessening, he pulled himself away from her. Her red eyes looking up at him, he lifted her to her feet. He led her towards the exit of the cockpit.

“Scourge, get us back to Aliso.” He said quietly.

The droid silently obeyed his orders as Qormus led Mirella out.