

Operation: Raptorstrike

It had been an average day on Selen, and then the courier droid arrived with a message. The message was short and cryptic. A simple code that was to be transmitted, its origin source was unknown. What was even stranger, and somewhat concerning, was who it was addressed to, An'ja Mao, an Identity known only to the highest echelons of the Inquisition. The Message ended with a set of co-ordinates and the inquisitorial seal. Who would be sending such a message?

Edema, with her cousin in tow, headed to the *Nightfall Prism*. The coordinates would take them out of Arconan held space into those controlled by the Dark Council, territory that they rarely entered.

The *Nightfall Prism* left the docking bay, its destination, the dark blackness of space, into the unknown. Edema was not often worried or in fact scared, but today she was. The message leading them here was so compelling, as if it was almost an order, but so cryptic and disconcerting. She left the bridge in the hands of KayCee and headed down to gather her gear and her thoughts, the ship jumped into hyperspace as she descended.

In the crew area she saw her cousin, decked out in her armour, she was a terrifying sight, but the Arconan could see the concern on her face as she cleaned and prepared her rifle. Edema walked over to her armour case, the door slid open revealing her suits of Mandalorian armour, her combat robes and specifically the item she was wanting for this...outing, her Chief Inquisitor armour and mirrored helmet. The pair of Equites nervously prepped their gear; Lanvarok's were loaded and primed, throwing blades stowed, blasters charged and lightsabers clipped on. Edema sighed, this was perhaps the first time she was going into a situation where she was not convinced she would come out the other side alive, her fears were about to be further compounded.

KayCee made a frantic call on the com for the pair of them to get to the bridge with haste... what now, after everything that has occurred today, how could things get any worse. When they arrived, Edema wished she had never had the thought. Before them lay Arx, the coordinates they had been given were not just for the planet but for a very specific place on the planet... The Dark Ascent, why in the name of the Sith had they been brought here?

Almost immediately, the com lit up with Arx security and traffic control

"Unidentified Vessel, Transmit clearance code or you will be destroyed"

As if to compound the threat, two Star Destroyers began angling towards them.

KayCee, in his best imperial droid voice replied

"This is the Military Shuttle Nightfall Prism requesting land permission, clearance code Alpha-One-Five-Nine-Echo"

The droid read out the clearance code as the message had said to, they waited and hoped.

There was a pause, the tension on the bridge of the shuttle was almost palapable, then the com system sparked back into life

"Code received, does you vessel have Holocom capability?"

Edema Ru'h-Kalinor #2778

Edema and Jor looked at each other, then at KayCee. Why would they want Holocom access?

Edema spoke into the com system

"Yes we have holocom facilities; may I ask why you require them?"

There was no reply, however the holocom system fired into life and displayed the symbol of the Inquisition and beneath it a coded message in auribesh. Edema looked at the code then realised she knew it all too well, it was tattooed on her back and wrists, it was her Inquisitorial access code. What the heck was going on?

The com system flashed again into life

"Nightfall Prism, you are clear to land, please slave your landing systems to the following beacon, you will be guided to your landing site, Arx Security out"

The three occupants of the bridge looked stunned, confused and lost...

Edema blurted out first

"What in the name of the Force just happened?"

The others shrugged and shook their heads, not knowing what to say in response

Without any further hesitation they slaved their navigation to the beacon as requested and were guided into a hangar bay in the depths of the mountain.

The ship settled on its landing struts, cooling gasses venting around the outside as the systems began to cycle down. KayCee was to remain with the ship and the others would...well they had no idea, it's not like they could break into the Fortress of the Dark Council, it was full of Guards, as well as the crack elements of the Brotherhood Military. The access ramp lowered and the pair half expected Iron Legion Troopers to be waiting for them, blasters raised... but there was no one, literally, the bay was empty apart from the occasional tech and droid busying themselves with other ships.

The two Sephi left the safety of the ship and walked towards the nearest access door. The door was secured by a code access panel next to it, there was a code cylinder port, a keypad and a scanner. Edema looked at her cousin who simply shrugged.

"Your the Chief Inquisitor Lady, not me, don't look at me, I'm just the bodyguard"

Edema sighed

"Fine, I will try and figure a way out of this mess"

She punched her Inquisitor Identity code into the terminal and the scanner lit up, she showed the hidden tattoo on her right wrist to the scanner and it beeped, pinged and the door slid open.

"Way to go E"

Jor punched her cousin lightly on the arm

"Hey stop that"

The corridor before them was quiet, but both Sephi could sense that they were not alone. Drawing upon the force, they vanished. The force cloaked and concealed the pair, and they were like ghosts in the corridor, stalking slowly forward. A shout was raised and their watchers appeared from concealed compartments in the walls, a dozen troopers emerged from their hidden spots, each appeared confused, the two Sephi intercepted various communications between the troopers, none could fathom where their targets had gone, they wouldn't get any more chances. The two Grey Jedi momentarily de-cloaked to send a volley of poisoned blades and blaster bolts before they scampered away and cloaked once more, their actions were followed by the sound of clattering armour and writhing bodies.

As the pair carefully made their way through the troopers on the ground, alarms began to sound. Ahead of them the exit door opened and in clattered more troopers. The first two never even knew what hit them, slug rounds punching through their helmets, dropping them, Jor'ana had dispensed with the subtle tactics and was lining her rifle up on the targets entering the room. Following her cousin's attitude, Edema likewise broke from her force cloak and sent her now glowing lightsabers arcing through the next rank of troopers, this was followed up by a burst of blades from her Lanvarok, bolts from her blaster and a significant gout of flame from her gauntlet weapons. Blaster bolts sizzled close as she did her best to deflect them when her blades returned, figuring that there was no real way out of this mess, she dove headlong into the troopers, the ferocity of her renewed attack catching them off guard as she hacked through trooper after trooper. Behind her Jor'ana tried desperately to support her cousin, but she was running low on ammunition, it was then she saw something that made her heart sink, they were dead. Edema hacked and slashed, ignoring the pain from the blaster grazes she had occurred, they didn't matter, only saving her cousin mattered. Her blades slashed through troopers, meeting no resistance until suddenly they did, she looked up and what she saw terrified her.

The corridor was filled with dead and dying troopers, their grey armour scattered across the floor, but before them stood terror incarnate, clad in shiny black armour, their cloaks drifting behind them, her lightsabers clashing ineffectually against the Beskar Saber Pikes they held. She looked up to see three Royal Guardsmen, their menacing helmets filling her vision. Visions of death filled her head, they were both dead, deader than dead in fact, they had attempted to get into the most secure facility in the Brotherhood, killing dozens of troopers. Panic filled her body and Edema just froze, fear gripped her, so gripped with terror she barely noticed the female Weequay behind them, The figure waved her hands and spoke something Edema could not hear and the guards backed away, the Sephi just slumped to her knees. The Woman walked over to her and beckoned for Jor to join them, neither felt that they had any choice.

"So you are the ubiquitous An'ja Mao? Is nice to finally meet you. Get up get up, no harm will come to you now"

Edema looked at her cousin then back to the Weequay, seeing little other option they both did as they were told.

"Come with me, we have much to discuss"

The woman once again gestured at the guardsmen who nodded and moved away, other troopers arrived to deal with the dead soldiers that littered the floor.

The two equites followed the woman, Edema had a faint idea who she was, but having never met the person she was thinking about she was unsure, she plucked up what was left of her fading courage to ask.

“ You are Ness'arin Ohnaka, head of operations for the Inquisition are you not?”

Ness'arin turned to the seer as they walked

“Ah once again your file does not lie, you are as inquisitive and smart as I had hoped. Yes I am she, and before you ask, for I am sure you are thinking of it, I was the one that, how should we say...encouraged, you to come here”

She paused for a moment, clearly thinking

“We wished to test you, both of you. Most would have balked upon seeing the location we directed you, others would never have had the courage to get through to the landing pad, and yet fewer would have had the grit and determination to fight on against odds that were clearly not in your favour, you were both willing to die so that each other could survive, I admire that and we need such loyalty”

The three approached a turbolift flanked with two staircase entrances, Ness'arin punched in an access code and the lift door opened, she gestured for the pair to join her in the lift. The journey was short and silent, none of them spoke, Edema and Jor'ana mostly out of trepidation, Ness'arin...well she clearly was waiting for something or was it someone. The door opened to reveal a large and grand area, sculptures and fittings adorned the space, along with several of the black armoured guards. Edema had only ever heard whispers of this place, she had never had the chance to actually be here. There was a dark and sinister beauty to the place enhanced by the colours, lightning and no doubt the significant numbers of darksiders that inhabited the space.

Ness'arin led them to a grand door flanked by two of the guards, they paid the three of them no notice, clearly they were expecting them, the Weequay turned to the pair

“You are now going to be granted access into a place few ever get to see, the information that you gather while in here is of the highest classification, however your file and your actions have shown me that your loyalty is not going to be an issue. The information that you will be party to will not be allowed to leave the room, I am sure an inquisitor of your elevation is aware of how this works”

Edema nodded, her voice stuttered

“Certainly, the thought of doing otherwise had never even entered my head”

The great door creaked open and before them lay a huge room, layered terraced seating surrounded a large holo emitter and other facilities, at the rear of the room was a grand chair. It took the pair a moment to adjust to the lighting and realise the room was fully occupied by none other than the Dark Council and their staff. The room fell silent as they entered, Edema was just glad she had her helmet on, her face was probably even whiter than usual as she felt the blood drain from it. The Grand Master spoke to end the silence that had taken over the room.

“Ah these must be the two who had been recommended by our illustrious colleagues within the inquisitorus. Come come, please be seated. You have clearly passed the tests and have not been too greatly harmed in the process”

Edema suddenly winced, the multiple blaster scores on her chest suddenly making their presence felt, it was clear others realised this too and one of the members of the room gestured to a staff member who fetched a medic. The MD droid that arrived patched up the Sephi, under the watchful gaze of all in the room, the Equite was terrified. Eventually she and her cousin were shown to a pair of seats close to the Voice, they sat down followed by Ness'arin and the room's uncomfortable silence ended.

The Hologram pad began to display a cluster of planets, Edema recognised one by the sprawling shipyards in orbit, it was Kuat, home of Kuat Driveyards, what on earth were they displaying images of Kuat for? The other planets she was unsure of, but they were clearly related to shipbuilding. The Auribesh that floated above them read Operation: Raptorstrike, what on earth was going on, and more to the point, why had the pair of them been 'invited' to attend?. Various members of the DC spoke at the display, discussing fleet numbers, construction issues, requirements, most of which went over the two sephi, they didn't have dealings with such aspects. It was clear that after recent conflicts, the Iron Fleet was in need of a new site for fleet manufacturing, this operation was looking into the plausible occupation of the planets Kuat, Absanz or Lothal. The briefing seemed to go on forever, discussing elements that neither of the two could understand, they frequently glanced at each other, both wondering what in the name of the Sith they were even doing here. Suddenly a feeling shot through Edema, as if a bolt of energy had been fired towards her, The Voice was gesturing towards the pair so they stood up, unsure exactly what they were to do.

“I have bought Chief Inquisitor An'ja Mao before you as she is particularly skilled when it comes to the more esoteric areas of combat.

“I have studied her recent activities including mission reports and accounts and I have been greatly impressed by her loyalty to both her Clan and the Brotherhood as a whole”

“We on the Dark Council are almost all, veterans in our fields, Politics, The Force, Combat, however our somewhat 'lofty' position does not always give us a boots on the ground appraisal of our plans, Raptorstrike is key to rebuilding our fleet and maintaining a strong position within the galaxy, especially with the fall of the Empire and First Order.”

The Voice gestured towards An'ja

“Chief Inquisitor... what would your assessment of our ideas be, given your experience and knowledge of such operations”

Edema looked somewhat stunned, thankfully she was still wearing her helmet, being referred to by her cover name was somewhat strange.

“Gracious members of the Dark Council, and the Grand Master, we are honoured to be before you especially at such a sensitive event.”

Edema gave her honest opinion over the plans, pointed out flaws and issues, made suggestions and each got an approving or interested nod, she was terrified through the entire event but put it out her mind, focusing instead on her experience and knowledge. When it came time for her to sit, she almost collapsed into the seat. The other members of the inquisition around her gave approving nods, her feedback had apparently been well received. The briefing continued for some time and eventually Edema and her cousin were led from the room when items on the agenda became of a more sensitive nature.

The journey back to their ship was far less arduous than their journey in, the Director escorted them back to the landing bay, commenting on the way about their feedback and suggestions during the briefing, he appeared impressed and validated in his decision to bring them in.

It would be three months before Operation: Raptorstrike would happen, but thanks to the input of one young, somewhat nervous Sephi, the planet Kuat fell to the forces of the Dark Brotherhood, invasions of the Sienar-Jaemus systems was put on hold until resources could be increased to guarantee success. With Kuat Drive Yards working at full speed, it would not be long before the fleet's losses were replaced.