



# Live and Let Die

*VORNSKR*  
**75**

LIVE AND LET DIE

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# O1

## THE HUNTRESS - DIRECTOR HOYER

*\*Three days before The Shot\**

“Yes, we all agree that he has to die.”

The long windows of the boardroom provided a panoramic view of Port Kasia’s affluent Arasaka Waterfront. At the head of the boardroom, lit by the dying embers of the days sunlight, the director’s stern, angular features shone with an orange glow, a gaunt, pale face with short black hair. His voice was terse and brisk, the voice of a man frustrated by comrades on a different wavelength. A black shadow danced across the room as a small bird fluttered around, evading all attempts to remove it from the room. His Capital Enterprises cell in Port Kasia had one mission: oppose

Clan Taldryan at every turn, without being detected.

Director Hoyer didn't need his board's opinion on whether to kill the Taldryan Consul. The Chancellor had made perfectly clear his own opinion on the progress his cell had been making in Port Kasia, having utterly failed to prevent Taldryan's conquest. Something needed to happen, fast, or the director's head was next on the chopping block. The damn bird fluttering around the boardroom, always just out of reach, was how he felt about trying to land anything against Taldryan.

"No one is arguing about whether he has to die. The issue is whether we have anyone capable of doing it... whether we have the resources."

"We must strike while the iron is hot," said a broad man whose bulging arms threatened to rip through his military uniform, a gruff voice matched his rugged appearance. "Taldryan will still be in disarray, the new Consul has been in war since day one. The longer we wait, the more time he has to shore up his defences. We might never get a chance like this."

"Then how do you suggest we do it, Commander Shaw?" Director Hoyer's voice began to rise, a vein throbbing in the side of his head. "What chance do we have of actually pulling this off?"

Commander Shaw mimed an explosion with his hands. "Haulder will get it done."

There was murmuring of discordance across the table, and the director shook his head dismissively. "We've all seen the results of Haulder's work. Last time there were no survivors in the whole city block. If we kill him and the new Consul declares war on us we're finished. No. We

need a clean kill, efficient and simple. If this falls back on us... we definitely can't afford a war with Taldryan."

"Coward," said the military man. "Let them fight us, let them come to us, we have the home-field advantage."

"It's absolutely out of the question. We can't beat them in a straight fight. They have vastly superior resources and manpower, plus that cursed mercenary brigade."

"The Vornskr Battalion won't be a problem." A slender, lithe woman opposite the military man, in formal dress with deep brown eyes and hair, chose the perfect moment in the silence to make her small voice heard.

The director raised an eyebrow. "Not a problem, Anika? That General has won every battle we've fought him in. The troops are terrified of battling them. How will they not be a problem?"

Anika simply smiled a knowing smile, that said 'I know something you don't.' "Because they've been paid off."

Director Hoyer's brow furrowed sceptically. "I thought they were loyal to Taldryan. How did you just pay them off?"

"Loyalty?" Anika let out a little playful laugh. "That's not how mercenaries work. Loyalty to credits, maybe. They'll fight anyone if you pay them enough."

"If the Vornskr Battalion are out of the picture... that does change things," said the Director pensively. "It becomes far less risky to make a move."

"They're not out of the picture" Anika continued. "They're providing us with intelligence. The Consul is due to give a speech in the Arasaka Plaza in an attempt to placate the populace in three days time. It will be a big event publicly announced that morning." There was a murmuring of de-

rision by the board at the idea that Appius Wight could possibly win over the people of Port Kasia, that he had just claimed authority over by means of violent conquest.

“This sounds like the kind of opportunity we can’t pass up,” admitted Director Hoyer. “But what are we going to do?”

Ankira placed a datapad on the table. A cyan, flickering hologram of a city district appeared before the board, an elegant square in the centre of Port Kasia, usually frequented by tourists stopping to admire the views, with a podium for public events and surrounded by office blocks and apartments. “The plaza is surrounded by tall buildings with a lot of high vantage points.” Ankira pointed out some of the options. “Keisha can get it done. Wight will be wearing his armour, but the visor is a point of weakness. One shot from her rifle and it’s over.”

A rotund man at the end of the table let out a loud, derisive belly laugh. “Sure, let’s get our most talented sniper killed!”

Anika smiled and shrugged. “If she’s that good, she won’t get killed.”

The bird fluttered towards Commander Shaw, and he swiped at it once more with a muscly hand but it darted out of the way. “Keisha is skilled enough. But it would be her first job. I think this requires a more experienced touch.”

Anika sighed irritably. “Come off it, she’s never missed a shot in her life. You just point her in the right direction and the target’s as good as dead.”

“He’s right,” said the Director. “She’s good, but she’s too green. This is too much for her first mission. One



day, she'll become one of our most valuable assets, but she needs more training before taking on a job of this scale."

There was a sudden jet of red light, a sharp high pitched wail, and the bird dropped dead in the middle of the table, a burning hole through its head.

Heads turned to the open doorway, where flames danced in the Zeltron's blue eyes. Keisha's long flowing black hair covered more of her violet skin than did her tight black tunic. Smoke still billowed from the rifle in her hands, thin and slender as the woman herself. "Anyone else doubt me?" Predatory eyes jumped from one executive to the next, watching the quivering squirms follow her aim. "Just give me a reason."

"See!" shouted the rotund executive. "Juvenile theatrics! We need a clear head in the-

PEW

Keisha's second shot singed the man's ear – close enough to cause a burn and a yelp, but no real damage. "Sorry Guoba, say that again? I didn't quite hear."

Guoba opened his mouth, paused for a second, then closed it again.

"Smart. The only reason Hoyer keeps you around, you fat lump." Not waiting for an invitation, she walked straight up to the table, swaying her hips as she did so, pulled up a chair and sat down.

"You've made your point, Keisha," said the Director. "We will give you the benefit of the doubt here and a chance to prove yourself, but," he raised his hand as the rotund executive began to speak, "There will be no escape plan. If you are captured, we will disavow all knowledge of you."

The desire to prove herself shone in Keisha's sapphire-

blue eyes. “So, who’s dying?”

“The Taldryan Consul, Appius Wight.”

There was a brief moment of pause, where Keisha’s response lacked its usual instant snappiness. The moment lasted long enough for heads to turn in her direction before she responded. “I’ll get it done.”

“The problem remains,” said the military man over the awkward ensuing silence. “Of how we get Keisha in.”

“Don’t worry,” said Anika. “I’ve got a plan for that too.”

## O2

# THE VORNSKR AGENT - ORSON TRENT

*\*One day before the shot\**

He strode into the board room, dressed in the finest of formal business attire, with an air of confidence and swagger about his gait. Everything about him looked a million credits, but the scar on his right cheek gave away that this was a man who had known battle. His blue-grey eyes scanned the room, shooting a playful wink at Anika before his eyes settled on Keisha. He looked her up and down and nodded in approval at what he saw.

Director Hoyer suddenly got to his feet, leaning on the table with both hands. “And who do you think you are?”

“The name’s Trent. Orson Trent.” He spoke with the

tone of an educated man, evenly stressed syllables with almost musical prosody. “Security detail to the Taldryan consul. I’m here to get you in.”

“I told you I paid off the Vornskr Battalion,” said Anika. “This is what they provided. Orson Trent, codename Vornskr Seven.”

Keisha looked from Orson back to Anika, then back to Orson again. “Nice pick Annie.”

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance.” Vornskr Seven finally tore his eyes away from Keisha’s form and walked around the table, offering a hand to the Director, noting Keisha’s eyes following him as he walked. The director barely acknowledged Vornskr Seven’s hand, busy as he was glaring at Anika with doubt and suspicion in his eyes, but Commander Shaw exploded before the director opened his mouth.

“All the firepower in the Vornskr Battalion and you bought *one* man?! You could have bought the General, that wolf guy with the sword, a battalion of troops, anyone, and you just got this guy? What are you up to Anika?”

“If he does a good job, one man is all you need,” countered Anika. “And if he didn’t do a good job, he wouldn’t have earned the Vornskr designation. The General doesn’t give that away easily.”

“I don’t like this Anika. I don’t trust this man. How can you be sure that Orson is on our side?”

“I’ve come here alone and unarmed,” said Vornskr Seven with a touch of incredulity in his voice as if shocked by the fact that the question could even be asked. He took a seat opposite Keisha, next to Commander Shaw. “If anything I should be the one asking if I could trust you.”

He watched the Director's facial expressions closely. He knew he had said the wrong thing by the sharpening of the Director's expression. That is exactly what a spy would have said.

"It's not like we have much of a choice," Anika cut in. "We *need* somebody on the inside, that understands the Consul's movements. Would you trust one of his loyalists or a mercenary that follows the credits?"

"Well, what happened to Vornskrs One to Six?" asked Director Hoyer, the level of anger in his voice rising even further. "Couldn't we have got a better one? Why settle for Seven?"

"The others aren't providing security services to the Taldryan Consul," Vornskr Seven said matter-of-factly and noticed how reminding the Director of this simple fact placated his aggressive expression slightly. This was the lever he needed to earn the Director's trust. He was their best chance of getting Keisha in a position to take a shot at Wight, whether they trusted him or not, and everyone in the room knew it.

He watched keenly as Director Hoyer looked at the rest of his board, contemplating his options. "I don't trust this man. Shaw, remove him from the building."

Shaw roughly grabbed Vornskr Seven by the wrist. Reflexively, he twisted his arm and escaped the grip of the much stronger, larger man, but then found himself gripped tightly around the bicep.

"But-" said Anika

"He's an unknown quantity," the Director said with an air of finality. "Unknown quantities are dangerous."

Shaw manhandled Orson with brute force, pulling him

out of his chair and towards the door. After a second of resistance, he realised there was nothing he could do against the vastly superior size and power of the commander. He was going to be ejected from the building, rejected by the group he was contracted to help. Shaw pinned his arms behind his back and began to push Orson towards the exit.

Then there was a flash of purple and black. Before Orson realised what was happening, the grip on his arms had been released. There was a scuffle behind him, grunts of a male and female in a great struggle. He turned to see Keisha behind him. Shaw hit the ground with a heavy thump.

“In all this bickering you’ve forgotten the most important person here!” Keisha aimed her rifle at anyone that dared to move. “I’m the one making the shot. I’m making the call. Orson joins the team. If he betrays us, I’ll kill him.”

“Childish threats again,” said Guoba. “Kid, if he betrays us, he’ll have killed you before you know about it.”

“Let me make myself *perfectly* clear.” The director was now also standing. “Keisha, two days ago you joined this meeting uninvited and attacked a member of the board. Today, you have attacked another. These are *serious* transgressions. You and Orson Trent are to leave immediately. *However*” he raised his hand as Keisha looked like she was about to explode again. “You are to continue the mission and continue to report your progress. If the Taldryan Consul dies during his speech, there will be no further punishment, and you will be adequately rewarded. Now leave.”

# 03

## THE SPACE BAR - KEISHA TSUFRALAI

*\*One day before the shot\**

A cold sea wind whipped at Port Kasiya's Arasaka Waterfront, where tall, curved glass buildings reflected panoramic views of the Kasiya Ocean. Keisha glanced up at the affluent district, and folded her rifle, concealing it in a bag at her hip. This wasn't the Westwind district, walking around the Arasaka Waterfront with a military grade sniper rifle would not end well. She could feel the chill against her exposed legs and arms as they walked into the brisk evening sea air, having been ejected from the board meeting. Orson chuckled slightly. "Well, that could have gone better."

Keisha didn't even know why she had acted the way she

did. Maybe it was his charming smile, or how he dressed. Maybe it was that swagger to his gait or maybe it was that musical prosody to his voice, or maybe it was his calmness, cool and collected in the face of the Director. Or maybe it was all of the above. All she knew was that she wanted him on the mission, and not just for his knowledge on the target.

Orson's presence and her insistence that he join had raised the stakes considerably. Should the mission fail as a result of him, it was her call and it would be her head that the Director placed on the chopping block. Simply the fact that he had joined the cell's board meeting was a risk. This Vornskr Agent knew the location of their headquarters in the heart of the Arasaka Waterfront, although that one was on Anika. Her bravado was just a front. She had never conducted a mission like this before, never gone out into the field to do serious work. On the outside, her theatrics had landed her the job, but apprehension and nerves bit at her insides. "I do hope you have a plan, Orson."

"I could do with a drink."

"I mean for the mission."

"Oh so did I," said Orson. "If we're working together, maybe we should get to know each other."

It was hard to argue with that offer. Especially as Orson had already started walking along the seafront promenade without waiting for an answer. Confident and decisive.

Keisha jogged to keep up with the agent as he turned a corner. Clearly, he knew exactly where he was going and regularly frequented these parts of the Waterfront, home primarily to the rich and elite. Keisha's eyes kept drifting upwards. "You sure people like me are allowed here?"



“Beautiful women with barely any clothes on? Very welcome, trust me, but usually on the tables rather than sitting at them.”

Keisha didn't know whether to smack him in the back of the head or laugh at his brashness. “No, I mean... people from Westwind.”

Orson approached a cantina with a glass door, and *The Space Bar* in elegant, cursive font on the front wall. Orson pushed open the door. Inside the cantina had a pristine white marble floor and furniture that almost shone under the bright ceiling lights.

“You're with me,” said Orson, walking between the tables of the chattering elite as Keisha followed him to the bar. “Nothing will happen if you're with me.”

“Orson!” said the bartender with open arms.

“Evening Ristarin.” Orson inclined his head respectfully.

“Welcome back to The Space Bar! And you've brought a friend! What'll it be today.”

“Three measures of Sullustan's, one of vodka, half a measure of a Corellian White. Shake it over ice, and add a thin slice of lemon peel.”

“Certainly, sir,”

“You know what you want.” Keisha paused, taking in what Orson had just said. Usually, she'd just have a beer from the Westwind Waterfront. Orson's order seemed so complicated, so refined. Would she be judged for not ordering in the same way? Would asking for a beer be committing some kind of faux pas that a Westwind street urchin like her would never understand? Would Orson look bad if she ordered wrong?

“And yourself, young lady?” The bartender was staring. So was Orson. She had taken too long to decide.

“Oh... er... I’ll have one of those too.”

Two drinks were served and they took their seat in the corner of the bar, furthest away from everyone else.

As alluring as Orson was, he was not too be trusted. As soon as they sat down, Keisha kept her eyes keenly on Orson. As she saw him scan the surroundings, she quickly switched the drinks over.

Keisha took one sip of the clear, innocuous-looking drink. The taste hit her like a freight train. She almost choked on the immediate harshness of the alcohol before a sweet, botanical flavour began to seep in. One thing that was certain is that it had not been tampered with. She looked around at the rest of the bar. “Do people here really drink this?”

Orson laughed. “I don’t know, I just made it up. I’m a Westwinder too. Most of these people don’t know what they’re doing either. You just have to look the part and pretend.”

She was showing too much weakness. She had revealed too much to Orson and needed to reassert her dominance over the situation. This was her mission, and she had to be in control. She knew what Orson was doing, trying to impress her so that she would let her guard down.

Out of her bag, she pulled a slender, curved silver dagger, polished to the point that the flat of the blade reflected the bar. “I know what you are, Orson,” she said before she had fully thought out what she was going to say.

Orson barely reacted, taking another sip of his cocktail. “200 percent sexy?”

“You’re a *mercenary*,” Keisha snarled. “And mercenaries can’t be trusted. I don’t trust you, Orson. I meant what I said before. If you double-cross me, I *will* kill you.”

“Keisha.” Orson seemed unfazed, still sitting back in his chair, maddeningly relaxed. He reached out a hand, putting it on the hand that held the dagger. As Orson’s hand touched hers, she felt her grip loosen on the hilt and readjusted her grip. “If I wanted to double-cross you I’d have had Ristarín spike your drink. You know that, that’s why you swapped the drinks over. Yes I saw that. I let you do it, so you knew I didn’t. This is a big mission Keisha. We can’t do it unless we trust each other. Now, put the knife away and let’s talk like adults.”

Everything Orson said felt so smooth and compelling. Her threats had accomplished nothing. He had clearly faced more death threats than the cell’s board. If he was planning to betray her, threatening him with violence was not going to change anything. And he was right, trust was essential. “I don’t want to kill you anyway.” She put the dagger back into her bag and had another sip of the drink. It actually tasted good once you were prepared for the harsh initial taste.

Orson looked deep into her eyes. It was as if he was reading a book at a long distance. “You’ve never killed anyone before, have you Keisha?”

“Anika told you that?”

“No, you did.”

“When?”

“Just now. When you asked if Anika told me that. That confirmed it. But in truth, you just don’t have the eyes of a killer.”

“You- you’re...” There was no point in denying it. “You’re right.”

“The Taldryan Consul. One hell of a first job. How’d you end up with that?”

“Same way you did. I threatened the Director til I got my way.”

“You threaten violence a lot for someone who’s never killed. If I didn’t know any better I’d say all that melodramatic bravado is a screen to hide your inner insecurities. You’re doing this to convince yourself that you’re dangerous.”

“While you... you told me you’re from Westwind. You didn’t come from money yet you wear that suit with such swagger. You enjoy putting on the air of superiority to impress people who don’t know you’re faking it everything while you’re clearly looking at my chest and not listening anymore.”

“Guilty. But are you going to deny you’ve been undressing me with your eyes since I walked in the boardroom? *Nice pick Annie*” he imitated Keisha’s voice.

“Shut up,” said Keisha as her purple skin turned a brighter shade of magenta.

“We don’t need to conceal anything from each other. I’ve got an apartment just down the road. Let’s head back to mine, get some drinks in and see where the night takes us.”

# 04

## THE TACTICAL CENTRE - ORSON TRENT

*\*On the morning of The Shot\**

“The speech is today. Get up.”

Keisha’s voice, harsh and demanding, woke Orson from his deep sleep. “Maybe later.” He groaned and rolled over, away from the harsh voice.

“Now, Orson.”

“You’re worse than The General,” Orson moaned, still groggy and in a state between sleep and wake, barely aware of what he was saying.

He felt a soft thump in his back. His clothes were in a ball beside him, where Keisha had thrown them at him. “Get dressed, Orson. We don’t have time to mess around.”

He wished Keisha would just relax, but he understood her urgency. Orson may have had similar feelings were this his first job, wanting everything done yesterday.

He rolled over again to find Keisha standing over him, fully awake and as fully dressed as she ever got. Her hair was straight, clean and slightly damp. She had clearly taken the liberty of using his shower facilities.

You do actually have a plan don't you?"

"Besides drinking and f-"

"Yes."

If Orson had his way, the morning would be a repeat of the previous night, they'd worry about the mission later, pull through whatever chaos ensued and go home well paid. But he needed Keisha's trust that he wasn't going to mess this up for her. The going home well paid bit wasn't going to work out unless she felt safe and comfortable, especially as she needed to make the key shot.

"Alright." Orson finally rolled out of bed and put on his clothes. "Follow me."

He tapped in a staccato rhythm on a brick in the bedroom wall that looked to the untrained eye like any other. Except, at his final touch, a segment of wall receded and split into two, revealing a hidden door.

"The General would flip his lid if he knew I was showing you this."

The dark room was bathed in the blue light of three computer terminals lined up on a wide desk, on which a single glass sat half-empty. One wall was occupied by a huge map of port Kasia filled with various hand-written annotations, and the opposite wall with a small arsenal of weapons and gadgets.

Keisha looked at the array of weapons on the wall, then at the high performance computing equipment underneath the desk. On each terminal was a different screen displaying intelligence about people of interest, Vornskr Battalion contracts and current affairs. “The Collective just give us a rifle and a shooting range,” Keisha said with a tone of admiration and a touch of jealousy.

“Funded by the Vornskr Battalion. All Vornskr Agents have an apartment with a tactical centre like this.”

“All in Port Kasia?”

“I only know that Vornskr Two’s is on Chyron and she has bright pink bed-sheets... I’m joking,” Orson hastily added as Keisha’s eyes burned with anger. “Anyway, take a look at this.”

He tapped at the control panel and a 3D model of a city square surrounded by tall buildings appeared, spread across all three terminals. “You’re familiar with the Arasaka Plaza?”

“I’m familiar with this model,” said Keisha. “Anika showed the same one at the board meeting.”

Orson zoomed in on a podium on one side of the square, in front of an ornate building that looked a few centuries older than the modern tower blocks on the other sides.

“The Taldryan Consul will making a speech here, talking about how wonderful Taldryan is.” Keisha snorted derisively.

A few more taps at the terminal and a 3D model of a man in heavy Mandalorian armour appeared. “The Consul will be wearing this.”

“Why the armour? Is he expecting trouble?”

Orson laughed out loud at the question. “He’s scared

of his girl. She won't let him be seen in public without it."

Keisha also barely suppressed a laugh. "Even the most powerful man on the planet backs down when their girl's annoyed."

"As funny as it is, that armour poses us problems. It's made of Beskar."

"Of what?"

"Mandalorian Iron. It's impervious to blaster bolts."

"So what chance do we have?"

Orson tapped at the terminal again and the visor became highlighted. "You need a shot straight on and straight through the visor. It's made of a weaker material. Your rifle is fitted with an Overcharged Actuating Module, right?"

Keisha nodded.

"That should make it through the visor with enough power to kill the Consul."

Orson rolled back to the model of the Arasaka Plaza. "This apartment block here." An office block began to glow blue at his words. "Will offer a direct full-frontal view of the Consul as he conducts his speech. He will be protected by a small legion of Taldryan stormtroopers, but this window right here." The rest of the building returned to grey except one window towards the top. "Will provide an angle to shoot over them and into the visor."

"Looks like a clear shot," said Keisha approvingly, notably more calm after seeing the tactical suite and that Orson did actually have a plan for this. "What about the security? Where will you be?"

"I am the security, remember? I'll be stationed here." The model zoomed in on a narrow road entrance to the square. "From 3 hours before the speech, everyone enter-



ing the Plaza will have their bags checked for weapons. I'll remain at my post to keep my cover and keep you updated via commlink."

"So you get me into the square, I go into the apartment block, pick the lock to that apartment, set up my sniper rifle and shoot Appius Wight in the head. Then what happens?"

"He dies, hopefully."

"You know what I mean."

"It'll take them long enough to search the building that you should have time to get to the roof and rappel down the back wall. Then you'll land outside the Plaza and we'll go for a drink."



# 05

## THE BLAST - ORSON TRENT

*\*Thirty minutes before The Shot\**

The Arasaka Plaza was never the quietest part of town, but tonight, with the Consul's public address imminent, the plaza was almost at its maximum capacity. But while usually a place of entertainment, where people would go for recreational activities, today the mood was different.

The huge crowd of citizens on the white marble paving stood tense and anxious. Wight had very few supporters in Port Kasia and the mood of the crowd demonstrated that as much as anything else ever could. Orson wasn't even sure how many were there of their own volition and how many had been coerced into listening to what the Consul had to say. A line of Taldryan stormtroopers armed with riot shields and electrified control batons stood between

the crowd and the podium.

Orson's day had been dull and uneventful. A couple of people attempted to bypass the weapons scan using a sensor signature reduction modification, but the security team had been briefed on the recent rise in use of this kind of technology. His evening remained dull and uneventful until a purple-skinned woman in a small black skirt sauntered towards him, with a bag hung over her shoulder.

"Evening Keisha."

"They let you do this on your own?" Keisha's voice sounded less like admiration and more like she was shocked that anyone would trust Orson to work on his own. She walked right up to Orson and whispered in his ear. "What if some beautiful woman tries to use her figure to get by you."

"Then she better be named Keisha. Show me your bag. We don't know who's watching." In Keisha's bag was her sniper rifle, disassembled, and the dagger she had threatened him with in The Space Bar.

"Nothing dangerous here." Orson winked at Keisha, letting her through into the Plaza. She proceeded immediately to the building he had outlined previously.

Orson let in more people into the Plaza over the course of the next few minutes. Then, against the white marble of the Arasaka Plaza walked a figure encased head to toe in bright red armour, with a golden lightning bolt emblazoned across the chest. The crowd erupted into boos and jeers as the Taldryan Consul swaggered to the podium. There were screams of 'monster', 'butcher' and 'murderer' from the crowd. The Taldryan riot police battled against the front row of the crowd, beating them back with shields and batons as they attempted to breach the podium.

Orson knew that Wight didn't need protecting. They didn't call him 'Zappy' for nothing. Clad in heavy armour and able to call lightning from his fingertips, unarmed swarms of civilians stood no chance. The riot police were there to protect the crowd from the Consul and avoid another incident.

He looked over to the building where Keisha was supposed to set up. With the reflection of the low evening sun in the window, he could not see inside.

"Keisha, target is in the open."

Orson looked to the Consul, futilely to the window, and back to the Consul again. "Hello there!" said Appius genially, arms welcomingly outstretched to the jeering crowd.

"I'm on my way," breathed Keisha heavily. "One of the guards inside wasn't happy to see me."

"Were you seen fighting?"

"No, I knocked him out quickly. I've hidden his body."

"Well done Keisha. Wight is still in position."

"I'm in the apartment. Setting up now." Keisha took a deep breath, and Orson could hear her adjusting her rifle. "Target acquired." Appius had begun a vibrant, impassioned speech about how Taldryan rule would usher in a new era of prosperity and security to Port Kasia.

"Relax, Keisha, you've got this. It's a clean shot."

Orson had completely forgotten about his role as security guard by now, and kept looking from the Consul to the window, waiting for something to happen.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm nervous," whispered Keisha. "What if I hit the armour?"

“You won’t. This is no time for nerves, Keisha.”

Everything seemed to happen in slow motion as she took another deep breath, steadied herself, and slowly pulled the trigger. Then everything happened in a blazing flash. Her vantage point exploded into crimson fire. The crowd screamed as the window shattered, raining shards of glass onto them.

Keisha’s body lay motionless in the window, her skin blackened and burnt.

“Target down. Mission accomplished, General.”

# 06

## THE CONTRACT - ORSON TRENT

*\*Two days before The Shot\**

Ros's head felt like it was made of durocrete. The high pitched bleeping of the comms device pierced his ears, drilling into his brain, It was far too early for this. He could still smell the alcohol from the previous night, and the perfume of the twi'lek dancer he brought home, whose midnight-blue lekku now lay draped across his bare chest.

"Just ignore it, Ulil'ya," Vornskr Seven whispered into her ear. "It'll go away eventually."

But it did not go away. The bleeping never went away, disturbing him every time he tried to go back to sleep, every time he tried to reassure Ulil'ya that it was going to

go away.

“Maybe you should answer them,” said the soft, sleepy voice of Ulil’ya.

Vornskr Seven sighed heavily and lazily rolled out of bed, stepping across clothes that had been messily strewn across the floor the previous night. Next to two glasses of the finest Corellian rum, which had only ended up half-finished before more interesting had called, was the small, bleeping comms device.

“Are you alone?” the voice was strong, yet hoarse, speaking with an authority and directness that left no room for disobedience. This General’s voice was always followed, his soldiers ran through duracrete walls for him, he turned the chaos of war into a neat game of holochess, where pawns and kings alike followed his every move. To the Vornskr Battalion soldiers, the grunts of the Mudhorn and Acklay divisions, it was the voice that made them know they would return home victorious, to see their families once more. To Vornskr Seven, it meant work. It was the last voice that he wanted to hear this early in the morning, especially following such a wonderful night.

“Am I ever alone?”

“Now isn’t the time for jokes,” the General growled. “We have a new contract that has use of your skills and requires discretion. This is an assassination contract.”

“Who’s the subject that needs this level of precaution?”

“Appius Wight. The Taldryan Consul.”

“You cannot be serious.”

“Now get somewhere secure.”

“Fine, fine,” replied Vornskr Seven, leaving Ulil’ya alone in the bedroom for the security of the soundproofed tac-



tical centre. His career as a Vornskr Agent would be cut unceremoniously short if he revealed confidential information to a woman he had only met the previous night.

"Of course, you will not truly be assassinating the Consul," the General continued as Vornskr Seven shut the door behind him. "Wight has been a good friend to the Vornskr Battalion since our inception and the contract comes from a Collective cell."

"I've always found commitment to be a burden," said Vornskr Seven.

"Further, he is our most valued business partner, and the Vornskr Battalion has a reputation for honouring its contracts. We will not risk our reputation for a payout of this size from the Collective"

"See, we're not too different General. Your honour has its limits too."

"What are you implying?"

"Honouring contracts is important, but you're going to break this one for the sake of your friend."

"No," said the General in a voice that left no room for argument. "This isn't about friendship. The Collective killed my daughter. We will never take their side. Besides no contract will be broken by the Vornskr Battalion. I've heard you're very well acquainted with Vornskr Two?"

Memories of those late nights flashed into Vornskr Seven's mind – nights of Correllian rum and a holovid, followed by a game of his favourite variant of Pazaak.

"And I've heard that she is very well acquainted with your lack of commitment." The General's voice jolted Vornskr Seven's mind back into the room.

"We might have met once or twice. What about her?"

“She’s on infiltrated the Collective cell and is on the board as a staff officer. They know her as Anika. She is the one writing up the contract. The deal is simply to get you in place to make the shot. The shot doesn’t have to find its mark.”

“Remind me never to play Pazaak with you.”

“The assassin will be a Zeltron sniper called Keisha.” The General continued to bulldoze through the conversation, ignoring Vornksr Seven’s quips.

“A Zeltron eh? Never met one of those I didn’t like.”

“That’s good because you need to like her. You are to earn her trust, get her in position, and then make sure she misses.”

“I’ll get her in whatever position she prefers.”

“Do what you have to do.”

Vornskr Seven smiled. It was a rare occasion that it was literally his job to be himself. It had become perfectly clear now why he had been selected for his position and his frustration about being taken away from Ulil’ya was fading by the second.

“We have a fake identity for you. You will go in as Orson Trent, security detail to the Taldryan Consul. That will help you get Keisha to the agreed upon vantage point.”

“Orson Trent? General...”

“Yes I know,” the General spoke over him. “But the last two times we gave you a fake name, you revealed your real name five minutes into the mission anyway.”

“It’s so overt, it’s covert.”

“Yes well, we’re just going to play into that now. Your fake identities will be Orson Trent from now on.”

“Works for me. Less to remember. Anything else I

should know?”

“The Convor Unit in R&D have come up with a new toy for you and Keisha to play with. It’s a rigged power cell. You are to swap her sniper rifle’s power cell with the fake while her guard is down. When she fires the shot, the rifle will explode and look like an accident.”

“Nothing like an explosive climax. Vornskr Seven out.”