Tanaab, Pandath, Spacer District

40 ABY

The soft and cool caress of a mid-winter breeze washed over the prone figure of Raleien Sonavarret. He grinned where he lay upon a soft and compact mattress, looking down the scope and barrel of an IQA-11 sniper rifle at the ground below. The cold had certainly never been an issue for the Pantoran man. He embraced the chill of winter like an old acquaintance from better times, with genuine fondness and only mild interest.

Memories of his home planet flittered in his mind for a moment before they vanished as quick as the frigid zephyr. *Now was not the time to reminisce*, he thought, scolding himself. It was a time to focus, to home in on his purpose for being here and now. He drew inwards upon himself, his consciousness plunging deeper into that amorphous abyss of delightful power he knew as the Force. In less time than it took to blink, the Pantoran internally reached out and ceased the vibrant power that lay beyond. He felt the Force course through his still body and calm his nerves.

With the supernatural control only the Force could provide, Raleien heard his conscious voice speak his mission clearly. The mission was to kill an aristocrat and Sith by the name of Kamjin Lap’lamiz.

Raleien’s shoulder suddenly itched where the tattoo of his self-proclaimed order now resided. The older Pantoran wanted to reach for the fading body art, but his training held firm and he kept his hands on the bipod supported blaster rifle. If the time came, he would reach for the lightsaber attached to his utility belt. But for now, the uncivilized yet extremely deadly plasma of a military-grade sniper rifle would suffice for his task. He continued to visualize his mission and the plan and allowed his power to course through him unused save for maintaining his composure and steadying his aim. He had purposely positioned himself upon the rooftop of a rather rowdy hotel at the edge of the Spacer district, which overlooked the jam-packed commercial and transport hub below. Intelligence reports provided by other disciples of their order, along with the reports of bribed officials, had been certain Kamjin would make a discreet appearance on Tanaab to dispense with some form of justice on behalf of this threat, the Dark Brotherhood. However, with help from the local administrator of the spaceport, the human’s starship would land nearby, and Kamjin would be forced into Raleien’s line of sight.

“*Raleien, this is Elena,”* said the voice of Elena Kol, his trusted pilot and his sole apprentice, through his commlink.

“Send it, Elena,” the Pantoran replied.

“*The Elder’s ship is landing momentarily. He’ll be on the path in perhaps five minutes, and within sight in ten*.” Her voice was devoid of emotion. Raleien only heard the cold calm of one of the best pilots he had ever seen supporting yet another important mission.

“Understood. Are you ready to exfiltrate?” he asked.

“Ready when you are,” she replied.

“Good. You’ll hear from me when I’m on my way, or if the plan falls apart.”

She responded, “I’ll let you know when the target exits the spaceport. Besides that, best of luck, Master.”

“And to you. Chains unbound. Raleien out.”

The commlink obeyed his verbal command and he heard the line cease.

It was time. Taking the energy and focus he had been maintaining within himself, he then pushed his capabilities outward and away from him. The Force amplified his comprehension of the world around him. An awareness of other sentient lifeforms sprang into existence in his mind. At first, it was an almost overwhelming sensation of life that would never fail to humble the aging man about his place in the world. When one could feel all this life around them, Raleien couldn’t fathom how one could think of themselves inherently superior to any other lifeform. In the grand scheme of things, they were all microbes within the incalculable morass of the known universe. Not even the most powerful of Force users was more than the mightiest tardigrade in comparison to the uncaring void.

A sense of power blossomed in his thoughts. In an unmistakably Imperial-esque ship perhaps three hundred metres away that was in the process of landing, Raleien felt the weight of power coming from within. It was stained with darkness, and its presence upon Tanaab felt like oil being poured upon clear water. That had to have been the target.

He couldn’t help but to briefly reflect on the potential differences in Force application between him and someone like this human aristocrat. Control of his powers was, Raleien had learned, different. Many of the Talented that his Master had spoken of became Jedi or Sith, adherents of Ashla and Bogan’s strict philosophies. Unlike the Jedi, the assassin was not dedicated to the calm of the Light, nor did he completely bow to the Dark, as the Sith did. Though his former Master had once been a Jedi, the unending cycle of war and death across the galaxy had driven him down a path wedged in that evolving abyss between the ideals of peace and pride. Commonly, the Talented like Raleien and his siblings were simply known as Disciples of the Force. Though Master Finway had another name for them, one he had kept secret between himself and his three apprentices. One that no other living soul would know unless they tore the clothes from their corpse and looked down upon the right shoulders of the believers.

After a few more moments, Raleien broke his concentration and withdrew back into himself. He felt a momentary pang of loss as his expanded senses returned to their more passive state. In comparison to someone without the gift of this power, he could still perceive living beings around him to a somewhat greater degree. Yet he could not maintain this heightened awareness without expending energy he might need in case their plan went awry.

Seconds passed, and Raleien lay almost motionless on his rooftop perch. Looking through the scope of his rifle, he adjusted its positions back and forth, left to right, searching the crowd for signs of the human Sith. In his pack were the various pictures and documents describing the man’s likeness, and Raleien knew it off by heart. He was confident he could pick Kamjin out of a thick crowd, so long as he hadn’t changed his entire wardrobe and look in the last three weeks. The Pantoran’s breathing was measured, under control, exactly as he had been trained. In – and out.

In.

And out.

“*He’s through*,” came Elena’s voice before the channel cut off again.

Seconds later, Kamjin appeared in Raleien’s scope. He had a few armed guards with him, but no other visible force users. The guards looked fearsome, but not insurmountable. And they couldn’t anything once Raleien put a blaster bolt through their leader’s temple.

He had not expected the moment to arrive so soon. Kamjin was out in the open, no conceivable forcefield in place, no beskar, no helmet, and head exposed to the overcast winter sky. This was it. Another job done.

Raleien breathed in and steadied the shot. His finger which had been resting firmly on the trigger now squeezed.

The blaster fired.

“Damn, I expected to find you sooner.”

Raleien only had time to see Kamjin manage to dodge the blast before the Pantoran willed his lightsaber to his hands with the Force and activated his yellow blade. He fell into his chosen stance, body shifted to the side, legs shoulder-width apart and bent at the knees, two hands gripping his lightsaber at a high guard angled upward and behind his head.

On the roof before him perhaps fifteen feet from where he had setup his hide, a woman beautiful woman with feline like features and dark robes examined him through calm, iridescent aqua eyes. This close he could feel her strength in the Force, and it may have outmatched his own. He also noted the lightsaber at her belt, and the energy bow slung around her shoulders.

Though he had been caught off guard, he stopped hesitating. Using the Force to aid his movement, he leapt at the yellow-skinned woman, executing an aggressive downward strike right at her head. Quick as a lothcat his opponent reached for her own lightsaber and brought the white blade to meet his own. Rather than blocking the blow, she parried his blade to the side harmlessly. She delicately side-stepped the larger Pantoran man’s reach and, with a graceful spin, moved to counter him with a sideways slash at his abdomen. Raleien pivoted forty-five degrees on his back left leg, angling his body and saber to execute a one-handed block of his own before regaining the initiative with a riposte of his own. She predicted his aggression, taking the disciple’s one-handed upward slash and batting the weapon aside before attempting to thrust her saber through Raleien’s gut. He leapt backward and, with his dominant right hand, spun his blade around in a desperate parry. Landing firmly with his weight supported on his back leg, Raleien had a few seconds to launch himself back at his opponent. He tapped deeper into his anger, allowing himself these feelings as he revelled in the battle to perform an effective falling avalanche. His blade crashed down upon the woman with incredible force and she was forced on the defensive. Raleien continued to reign blow after blow upon her, forcing her back step after quick step. She looked as if she was concentrating on the fight, but not as if she was in danger. They had been battling for long enough for the Pantoran force user to realize she must have been an adherent of the fifth lightsaber form variant Shien, as many of her own movements looked somewhat familiar to him.

Together, both Raleien and his opponent danced back and forth across the roof, embroiled in a desperate battle of martial prowess and cunning. Neither landed a blow on the other, and neither held clear advantage. At one point the two locked blades, growling into each other’s faces before breaking the lock. Mutually they had both decided to disengage and take the measure of the other. Now they circled one another, looking for an opportune moment to strike.

Raleien knew they were evenly matched in skill, though he had to admit that she might have the upper hand in both experience and raw power even if his lightsaber form was more suited for blade-to-blade combat. He was worried that his stamina was no match for this engagement, however. While he might have been skilled with blasters and saber, he was getting old. The one before him, regardless of her actual age, looked younger. She breathed deeply and sweat glistened on her brow in the peaking winter sunlight above, but he couldn’t rely on her growing as tired as he was to squeak out a win.

He had to escape.

“That’s enough, Rayne,” another voice said, surprising Raleien for the second time this day.

The Pantoran force disciple turned to face the newcomer and his heart sank. He felt the blood drain partially from his flushed face, and his stomach roiled with the nausea of raw terror. Walking out of the stairwell exit of the building was none other than the Sith target himself, Kamjin, accompanied by six guards with blaster rifles pointed right at Raleien. Kamjin didn’t have a blade in hand, but the sheer force of his presence almost overwhelmed the older force disciple.

“Did you have any trouble, Rayne?” Kamjin asked, looking over at the woman Raleien had been fighting.

She shook her head and replied, “No trouble. I’ll admit he fights well, though.”

“Does he, now?” Kamjin asked.

Raleien felt the yellow-skinned woman close the distance as he focused on Kamjin, but he was too slow to react. Before he could turn to face the woman called Rayne, she had her lightsaber pointed only millimetres from his back. Raleien grinned slightly and locked gazes with the Sith Elder. They thought he was afraid of death? A disciple of the Children of Mortis?

“You tried to kill me,” Kamjin began. “You would’ve succeeded, had this whole operation not been known to us. You’re good with a blaster, and with a blade. We could use you. We could use your information. And so, we’re going to take you prisoner. We’ll interrogate you, learn who this cult is, and by all accounts perhaps set you free if you pledge your allegiance to –“

Raleien cut off Kamjin by spitting at the ground in front of the man before whispering, “Chains unbound.”

And with that he pushed himself back *into* the lightsaber held at his back. He thought he could feel the searing hot plasma of the lightsaber blade sink into and cauderize his chest, but he didn’t scream. Instead he felt his mouth fall open and all the air in his body escaped him in a soft, wheezing gasp. His thick, tree-trunk like legs gave way and he hit the smooth duracrete of the roof’s floor. Blackness began to close in on his vision, and in his final moments before the darkness swept over him, he sent his thoughts and feelings outwards, focusing on two words with all of the reverence and devotion he could muster.

*Chains… unbound.*