*The holoprojection filled the dark room with a flickering strobe of white-blue light. The video-feed jumped, lurching as the automatic signal tuner scanned for frequency peaks. After a brief interval, the device was able solidify the incoming images.*

 Three figures appeared, seated in comfortable padded lounge chairs. A young and beautiful twi’lek girl batted long eyelashes at the man in the image. He was tall compared to the women. Between them, an elderly Zeltron lit a tabac cigarette at the end of a long quellazaire. She took a long drag on the slender cigarette holder and paused while the Twi’lek began to read from a datapad in her lap.

*A digit, obscured by the shadows of the room, depressed the volume control on the projector. The voiced raised up to fill the darkened chamber.*

The presenter’s voice was shaky.

“Hello! How are you?” the girl asked.

“Quite well, thank you.” The pair responded in discordant harmony.

“How are you enjoying Coruscant?” she asked with a smile.

The old woman replied with a series of platitudes and remarks about the weather and the kindness of the people. The Twi’lek took in the words, affirming and repeating portions of the canned response. She turned her attention the man.

“And how about you Derc?” the interviewer asked.

Her posture stiffened, anticipating his response. Her lekku twitched slightly, beginning to twist over one another and her hands balled up as her fingers nervously searched her palms. His voice was smooth and soft. His accent was slight, to the Coruscanti ear it had the gentlest hint of the exotic Outer-Rim Territories.

“Coruscant is a truly amazing place. Every time I am here, I find myself wishing I could stay longer. It is a beautiful cross section of our galaxy and I always have the chance to meet such wonder, charming, and interesting people. People such as yourself, Aaryka. Might I say, I absolutely adore the jewelry you’re wearing on your head-tails.” Derc Kast replied.

“Oh, really? You like it?” the girl said, nervously as she toyed with the bits of silver and gold lace that encompassed her

“Derc, bubbeleh, cut the raw phony-ium. This nice young lady has questions for us. You’re getting her all hot under the baffles and we’re not even one question in. This boy, I swear he could charm the fight out of a gundark.” Dame Sooni Krezz replied, lifting a tumbler to her lips and tossing back a sip. “Just give the girl a hug and let her get her holosnaps with you so she can focus on this interview. You don’t do that up front that’s all she’s gonna be all atwitter the whole time. We’ll be here for hours while she bumbles through this.” She looked directly at the young interviewer “That’s what you want, right, doll? One little hug and some snaps?”

“If is not too much trouble...” she said sheepishly.

“Of course, it’s no trouble at all.” Derc replied.

“Cripes, every blaster burnin’ time with this mess.” Sooni said under her breath, tipping back the last of the ochre fluid from the tumbler.

The man stood and crossed over to the girl, arms extended for an embrace. The Twi’lek girl nearly fell over scrambling from the chair to meet him. Her eyes turned up to meet his. He was taller than she thought he’d be. He wrapped her up in his arms and she pressed her head to his chest. She breathed in deeply. His cologne teased her nostrils and set her heart a flutter. His essence was subtle and floral, yet its’ sweetness was balanced with warm notes of exotic wood and a gentle hint of vanilla.

“You smell exactly like I thought you would. AMAZING.” She said.

“Oh, Thank you.” He chuckled.

“I guess some people don’t know the smell of pure bantha shit” Sooni said under her breath.

The pair stood motionless in several poses as a flurry of camera droids hovered about. He placed an arm over her shoulder as one flash illuminated them. She paused for a moment as if she were going to make a request, but turned away. He smirked and his hand slipped down to the small of her back.

“May I?” he inquired.

“Y-y-yes.” She replied, stuttering on the wave of anticipation.

He dipped the young woman as if they had been dancing on a fabulous ballroom floor. Her leg rose sliding up his body as he drew her in close. The camera droid snapped a photo and with the same fluidity with which he had assumed control of her reclining body, he drew her back up to her feet. The green-eyed man watched her as she spun back to the chair that she had been sitting in moments before. She stood silent for a moment, catching her breath. She fanned at her face with her hands and sat back down.

“My word.” She stated, searching for her mental bearings.

Sooni rolled her eyes.

Midday was giving way to afternoon. Long shadows were beginning to stretch over the city as the distant sun ducked behind the towering facades of newly completed skyscrapers. Tokare had once been one of the poorer cities of Seraph, having its’ wealth gobbled up in tithes to the Republic of the Force. But that was no longer, the roots of Sal Mal Repulsor and various other industrial enterprises had taken hold in the city. From the fallow fields of Seraph shoots of economic progress were reaching up into the heavens. The empty shell of the replica Jedi Temple no longer dominated the skyline. In its stead a forest of towers and minarets reached further into the heavens with each passing day. Soon, they would blot out all the light from the fane and the Republic of the Force would be forgotten entirely.

Though he was no tactical savant, he always found it curious how the various political bodies that had once run all of Seraph could maintain power over the starving masses of people. How had the Empire not been welcomed with open arms? Prosperity and a belly full of food, he found was the greatest method to secure loyalty. The principal was simple: Make a man rich, he will call you boss. Make an entire people rich, they will call you King.

He surveyed the territory, smiling with pride at the ever-growing success of his Imperial invasion by industrial proxy. An army, while effective, lacked the subtlety of this venture. In his absence, the Empire had become impotent. His efforts to rejoin the command structure had been belied by those who’d grown fat with political power and voices in the ears of the Emperor. It would slightly complicate his plan, but he could sidestep their protestations and attempts to distance him from that seat of power by going directly to those that would be ruled. The game of Clan politics always gave him a laugh; that they would dare refuse the Usurper. This time, the throne would be claimed by other means than the end of a lightsaber.

A soft touch ran up the short hair at the back of his head. Her fingers lingered for a moment before tracing down to his shoulders. She was his most efficient agent, the architect of his corporate annexation of Seraph, his most trusted partner, his confidant, his lover, his wife. Emily had been at his side for nearly a decade and she had rarely doubted his vision. It was that undying, unquestioning, and unyielding loyalty that had won her place in his heart.

“My love, someone has sent you another package.” She said.

“More fan-mail? Can’t Saris deal with it?” he replied.

“Saris said that you should see it for yourself, you might like it. It looks expensive.” She said, placing a soft kiss on his shoulder.

He turned with her to the penthouse suite, placing his arm over her shoulder as they walked together. Though the necessities of work had kept them apart for longer than either would have liked, being together brought a certain warmness to the home that was certainly lacking when they were apart. She had a reputation for being cold and overcalculating and he had merited a stigma for the opposite, being overly passionate and irreverent. When together, the extremes of their personalities melded together into a mélange that shielded the deficits they suffered independently.

The threshold of the door gave way to the cavernous room that made up the primary living area. Fine art decorated the walls and plinths about the room, each piece having been carefully curated or holding special significance in the timeline of their relationship. A bas-relief of cream-colored stone, depicting what could best be described as an abstraction of the feminine divine filled one wall of the hexagonal chamber. Two vases of ancient and master craftsmanship occupied either side of one of the portals into the room as if they were sentinels. Soft, plush carpeting, with gilded piping and swirling ivy patterning, made the cold dark marble flooring more welcoming for their bare feet.

The crate on the table caught his attention immediately. It bore on its’ face the signs of age beyond a single lifetime. Each mark on the weathered hide could have witnessed entire generations pass, and there were hundreds. She ushered him to the lounging couch, sitting beside him on its soft black leather pads. He looked at the box, examining it. He was no master of antiquity, but he had once played a cave diving historian in a film, so he could fake it well enough.

“Most interesting. This appears to be from the days of the Old Republic and judging by the construction, it must be several thousand years old.” He remarked, his confidence in delivery converted the words to truths.

“Open it!” she said excitedly.

He lifted the lid of the case, revealing within a statuette laid in silken cloths. Atop the small birdlike statue was a note, written on stark white parchment.

“A vision of you could set even a bird made of stone free to fly. An Admirer.” He read aloud.

“How much do you think it’s worth?” Emily inquired.

“Something like this? It’s priceless. It belongs in a museum.” Thran replied.

“It kind of looks like the thing in the second *Iridonia Jeerns* film. You know, the one where you went to Rhen Var and fought the Ice Snakes?” she casually remarked.

“What? The second one...Who would send me some reference from the second film? That’s no one’s favorite. I was in that damn film and even I don’t like it. Someone would have to be really obsessed with me have suffered through that film.” He scoffed.

“Many people are obsessed with you, Derc Kast.” She said with a playful smile.

“Oh? Like who, exactly” he replied, raising an eyebrow.

“Did you want a comprehensive list of names or the abridged version?” she said with a laugh

“No, a hit-list is a very private thing. I didn’t mean to overstep.” He teased.

“Please, a hit-list would imply that I saw any of them as a threat. I have no worries of someone stealing you away from me. They’d last a week max before you drove them absolutely insane. There is not a soul in this galaxy that is capable of putting up with you like I can! And need I remind you, it is my bed you keep coming back to. Anyway, put that stupid bird away and let’s go have a swim before dinner.” she said, leaning into him.

*A long finger broke the greyblue projection, stroking at the space occupied by the handsome man’s face. The cloaked figure turned, skulking across the darkened room. To a portion of the wall which had been adorned with renderings of Derc Kast’s face. Paper posters from his various films had been adhered to the walls, with all faces of the other filmstars having been cut from the renderings of their bodies. Several candles, burned down into amorphous puddles of wax clung to a plain desk. A wooden bowl overflowed with Bakura’s indigenous Namana fruits. The same long hand picked up a needle like dagger, pressing the point into the tip of the shadowed first digit.*

*The hand raised to a central portrait of the film star, smearing blood across the image of supple lips.*

“Sit down, you lughead. We’ve got three more of these damn things today.” The Zeltron said.

Derc obliged. He sat in the plush cushioned seat and crossed his legs. The Twi’lek presenter gathered herself, she continued to fan herself for a moment before settling back in to the routine of the interview.

“Well, after that...I think it goes without saying...This is the best day of my life! How does a girl get so lucky as to wind up interviewing not one but two icons!? Where do we even begin?” she asked.

“How about you start with the first question they wrote for you, vacuum-dome.” Sooni remarked.

“Soo, cut the girl a break will ya? Please, ask away!” he remarked.

“Well...Dame Krezz, let’s start with you...It’s been quite some time since you’ve had a major picture release, what was it about this story that made you say ‘I simply must make this film’?” the young woman placed her fingers on her chin and looked pensively at the legend of the silver screen.

“Not a bad start, missy. Well, I think we can all agree that the Galaxy has been in a bit of a flaming pile of shit for the last twenty years. My job as an *auteur de film,* if you will, is to provide the people who see the film with some measure of bullshit relief. Sometimes, we just want to be taken away to a different place. A place where we don’t need to worry about our problems for one hundred and ninety-five minutes. We know damn well we can’t solve all the issues facing the galaxy in that time, so I feel strongly that the people of the galaxy have earned a little break. This film does something that I have never seen in all my years in this industry...It actually delivers on the promise that films make. The promise to take you away for a little while so you can recharge. When we finished the script, I knew...This would be a parting gift to the Galaxy.” Sooni answered.

“Wow. You said that with such conviction...So, would it be safe to say you see this project as the culmination of your life’s work?” The Twi’lek asked, going off script.

Sooni paused a moment.

“When you get to be my age, you really start to think about the impact that you’ve had the people who’ve seen your work. Without this story, the tale of Sooni Krezz felt incomplete. I’ve had the pleasure to work with so many talented people over the years, all of whom were working towards preserving film as an art form. In a way, I feel like this is more than just my personal legacy. All the knowledge and talent that I’ve had the pleasure of being around in my many years has found a way into this film and I suppose as a result this is all part of their legacy as well. This film...well, it will be remembered forever.” The spitfire Dame was uncharacteristically somber in her response.

“And how does *the* Derc Kast find his way into that legacy? I mean this in the nicest way possible, but this film doesn’t really fit the pattern of previous roles you’ve had, Derc. How do you come to be a part of this production?” the girl asked.

“No, you’re absolutely right. This role is unlike anything I’ve ever done before. That is part of the reason why I wanted to be a part of it. I love the challenge of taking on a role that is outside of what I’ve done before. I’d read over the script before casting had begun and I knew that I absolutely had to be in this film. The other side of it is really simple. There are some directors that every actor wants to with. The opportunity to work with one of my personal heroes, someone I really admire, was really too good to pass up. Frankly, I got lucky. Production was already underway by the time I got attached to this project. It was really a bit of serendipity. Sooni and I happened to meet at, I believe it was an award show, and we really hit it off. She offered me a role and that was that, I left for set the next day.” Derc said.

“Don’t let him lie to you, girly. What he really means by we hit it off is that his people called my office for sixteen weeks and when we did run into each other he begged and begged for a role.” Sooni added.

“Ha. That’s probably truer than the casual way I explained it. Tenacity is a positive trait in this industry.” He laughed.

“And did you bring some of that tenacity to this role? You mentioned this character was a challenge. What was your preparation like for this role? What kind of challenges did you face while playing this character?” the interviewer inquired.

“Yes. I think you have to bring that to any character. But, this role took that to a new level. I spent a lot of time really getting to know my character, Arlind, in and out. The physical preparation for this role was also really difficult. At the beginning of shooting, I had to cut twenty kilos, then I had to bulk back up for the end of shooting. That definitely kind of thing is quite hard to do. Then there is the mental preparation, which is really much more difficult. Without giving away too much, my character had been isolated from society for a long time. For some species, that really has a very large psychological impact, and Arlind, being a Human like myself really had to deal with a lot of the consequences of the circumstances he found himself in. I can’t really say too much more about that, because it would give things away. At the end of it all, I had some excellent coaching and trainers that helped get me to the place I needed to be. When it came time to shoot, the mutual trust between performer and director made it easy to bring this story to life.” He stated.

“Dame Krezz, tell us more about that trust Derc was just speaking about...” the Twi’lek said, pivoting to the Zeltron woman.

“Well, I will start by saying this. I think we’ve all read the stories about filming with Derc Kast. You know, they say things like ‘Primadonna’, ‘impossibly difficult’, ‘like herding mynocks’...” Sooni began

“Ok...she gets the point. But, it’s true. In my younger days, I was really tough to work with.” Derc cut in with a laugh.

“Shut up, you’re still difficult, but I love ya you gamook...Anyway, when you make a film, you really rely on each other to bring out the best in each other. I think seeing all the prep that Derc put in really elevated the performances of his co-stars. Shockingly, he brought a lot of humility to this production. I think everyone on set sort of had a misguided expectation of what it would be like working with Derc Kast and we were all, thankfully, proved wrong. He’s an extraordinarily talented actor, a kind and loving man, and he manages all of that while being not-so-bad on the eyes.” The Zeltron said, placing a hand on Derc’s arm.

The Hangar was abuzz with the coming and going of all matter of standard starfighters. It had become standard policy for Arx Capital Exchange to execute a series of pre-sale quality control checks. The sources of many of the repackaged starfighters were questionable at best. The oversight of these checks did not fall under the purview of the Praetor, they were considered too menial a task. However, he took special interest in this focus as a matter of hobby.

While he had served his Clan as a fighter pilot in the past, his persistent obsession with fight craft had originated in his youth. A small entry in his father’s personal journal expressing the desire to fly had sparked the fixation, particularly aiming his eye at the various models of TIE Fighters which had rolled off the production lines of Sienar facilities galaxy wide. While the TIE line was true love, he found appreciation for many of the other makes and models that passed through Mattock Station.

An R-41 Starchaser was preparing for a routine system check, the deep roar of the powerful engines filled the hangar. It was a decent vessel, but perhaps he was appraising it with a higher value than it actually had, making up for performance gaps with high marks for a rather nice-looking hull form. He watched, silent noting his thoughts in a personal datapad.

A deck officer approached him with intent in his step. His heels clicked and he saluted upon reaching an appropriate proximity.

“Mi’lord.” The officer began. “We have a vessel prepared for you. It was just unloaded and fueled up. Would you care to inspect, Sir.” He added.

“I have placed no personal purchase orders, Leftenant.” Thran replied coolly.

“The invoice clearly states you are to take receipt of the vessel, sir. I am afraid the purchaser is anonymous.” The officer continued.

“May I see the invoice?” the Praetor inquired.

The deck officer passed a rectangular datapad to the Sith, indicating the details of the purchase order with a tap of the finger. His emerald eyes scanned the array of numbers. The SKU was a combination of numbers and characters which did not fit into the standardized pattern used by ACE Inventory Control Protocol.

“What matter of vessel is this? Why is this SKU not completed in the standard fashion?” he said, passing the placard back to the young deck officer.

“Mi’lord. To our knowledge, this vessel is one of a kind. I think it is best that you come with me. We must clear the berth in order to not delay the further unloading of inventory.” The rat-faced officer said.

“Very well.” The Sith said.

The officer saluted and in a well rehearse about face lead the taller Sith towards the racks at the rear of the hangar. They passed by a series of Astromech droids, GNK power units, and other lifeless machines. Crates of warheads and cylinders of fuel created a labyrinthine wall which occluded the fighter storage racks from the main hangar bay. They traversed in short order, pausing for load lifters and repulsor tugs that bisected their path.

In a short time, he was in front of the vessel. It was a variant of TIE Fighter he had never seen before. The solar panels curved inwards, with the distinct triangular points reminiscent of the TIE Interceptor at the front and rear. It was longer than the standard TIE. A quick inspection of the exterior of the ship revealed ion cannons and laser cannons had been fitted to the vessel, along with a small tractor beam emitter and a projector shield.

“My word.” He said. “Is this what I think it is?” he asked the deck officer.

“Aye, Sir. TIE model Aurek Dorn. Also known as the Avenger. Imperial Records only twenty-four prototypes of this vessel were ever built.” The officer remarked, scrolling through the notes in the datapad.

“Who sent this order?” the Praetor asked.

“Anonymous, I am afraid.” The officer replied.

“Leftenant, send that information to Accounts Receivable and inform them I have issued an audit request on the originator of this request. Mark the purchase as suspicious.” The green-eyed tyrant said.

“Yes, Sir. Right away. And the Vessel? What shall we do with it?” he inquired.

“I am going to inspect the ship and we will find a more permanent berth for it.” The Praetor replied, moving towards the ladder that led up to the boarding gantry above.

He thought about the vessel as he climbed. It was a gorgeous specimen of a TIE. The lines of its’ design met every standard of beauty he had for the venerable fighter line. The blue grey hull was the perfect shade of durasteel and being set against the obsidian black of the solar panels only heightened the richness of color. His boots clanged on the grating as he approached the cockpit door. The circular portal lifted open with a slight hiss and he jumped down into the seat within.

He sat in the flight seat, imagining all manner of prey this durasteel predator would be capable of dispatching. His hands traced over the controls, they felt intuitive and familiar. The bare skin of his fingertips chanced over a familiar fibrous texture. He snapped up the piece of parchment.

“A beautiful one-of-a-kind ship for a beautiful one-of-a-kind man. An admirer.” He read aloud to himself.

His stomach sank slightly. He tucked the parchment into his breast pocket and climbed out of the vessel.

“You talk about Derc breaking some of your expectations. What kind of expectations does this film break?” the Twi’lek girl asked.

“I was wrong about you, here I thought you were just another chirping qwerf and you’ve got some real questions. I’ll be damned.” Sooni said with a slight chuckle.

“I’ll take that as a compliment, Dame Krezz.” The girl said with a smile, turning hungry eyes to Derc.

“You ought to.” The elderly woman replied.

“I don’t want to say too much about what people should or shouldn’t expect, but I think people are going to leave the theater with a lot to think about on the way home.” Derc said.

“That’s goes back to the power of this story, honeybuns. This story is full of twists and turns. You’ll be expecting one thing, then BLAM you get hit by a rampaging rancor. Derc’s being quite reserved, shockingly. But, I would say people should expect to see performances that come but once in a lifetime and other than that, they should expect their expectations to be shattered.” Sooni said with a grin.

“Ok, then...Derc, Call someone out, by name...Who simply MUST see this movie?” the interviewer asked.

“Everyone. Everyone should see this film.” He replied.

“Ahhhh, helluva promotional answer, kid. But that’s cop out! Answer the girl’s question!” Sooni said, jabbing her bony fingers into his ribs.

“Okay, okay. I would say... Rees Minar. I really admire her work, but I think from a story telling perspective she could learn a lot from this film that would really help her with future projects.” He said.

 “Good answer! Well, unfortunately, that’s all we have time for today. I hope we can meet again. I can’t wait to see this film. You can see catch Derc Kast in Dame Sooni Krezz’s big blockbuster fil-“

*The sound of the holo-recording cut off, the playback had been paused on a close-up of Derc Kast’s face. A torch hissed to life, spitting flames upon the crumbling wick of the mountainous candle remains. Six fonts of flame illuminated the greater display of the shrine. A ribbon of cloth, seemingly from a pair of men’s undergarments, was stained with bright green impressions of lips. The long boney hand depressed a playback device, which played a clip from an obscure music group. The unseen stalker collected a tube of vibrant green lipstick from the shrine, smearing it over the still shrouded face. The fanatic’s body began to sway with the rhythm of the synthesizer sounds emanating from the small audio device. The figure slipped the cloak off, revealing a fully nude form still moving in time to the beat of the music.*

The Alium was on final approach. He did not frequent Ragnath, but the occasional visit to Adironam Tower was not cause for any suspicion. The Lambda-class shuttle glided with ease towards the landing pad. Mere meters away, the vessel’s s-foils actuated folding the wings up into the landing position. The magnetic clamps secured the ship with a dull thud. He ran his hands over the controls, initiating the shutdown process. The electrical life of the shuttle waned. The Sith activated the boarding ramp and departed the cockpit. He stepped off the ramp, unaccompanied. He raised the hood of his cloak, obscuring his face.

The last weeks had been filled with many curious happenings. It started with mysterious gifts appearing at his domicile and Mattock Station. Notes had been prepared with each of the seven gifts. Each gift had increased in value and rarity. It seemed that someone of great wealth and power had been vying for his affection. He had missed the first three gifts entirely. Perhaps the great benefit of having a team of managers, agents, and security to sort through his professional affairs had blinded him to the severity of this particular admirer’s affection.

It was not the first time that he had dealt with a stalker, but the nature of these gifts was far more lavish than previous obsessed fans had offered. That, he figured, made this individual decidedly more dangerous than any other he had come across before. The obsessive had been careful to cover their tracks, but his time in the Regent’s office had taught him a valuable lesson: Money always leaves a trail.

Forensic accounting was a fascinating field, one he had become familiar with in successful attempt to relieve the Banking Guild of a magnificently large sum of credits. A recent trip to Mygeeto had scrubbed the trail clean. He and his wife had gotten away scot-free, but more importantly the knowledge he’d acquired in their white-collar heist had easily put him on the trail of his stalker.

He’d come to Ragnath to inform the Clan’s de facto leaders of the apparent gaps in their security protocols. The receipt of the prototype TIE Fighter had specifically notified Thran that the offender was from within the Brotherhood. His public facing persona, Derc Kast, had to eschew his fascination with the legacy of the Galactic Empire. It was a matter of public appearance. Imperial sympathizers had been run out of the entertainment industry shortly after the New Republic had been established. Even more alarming, his affiliation with the more nefarious philosophies of the Sith would have an even greater detriment on his career. He could not risk that information getting out.

Two of Clan Scholae Palatinae’s guards stood silently at the portico which led to the turbolift. Each of the soldiers nodded as he passed. Although a recent excursion to retrieve remains had resulted in the sparking of a great flame of rivalry between the Warlord and the Consul of the heirs to the Empire, his march was not slowed. He was certain that the guards would notify the parties which ruled this city and moon. All the better, a man of his reputation and status merited a welcoming party. It remained to be said that it was a coin toss as to whether that welcoming party would have cool libations or warm blasters at hand.

A communicator chirped in his pocket. He flipped open the small device.

“Go for Thran.” He said plainly.

“Father, we’ve completed the audit. It is precisely as you thought.” The soprano voice said.

“Good work.” He replied.

“You should know, there was more to their plan. A large sum of credits was transferred to several accounts which had a common signor.” The voice returned.

“Who?” he asked.

“A nobody. Likely the party they were paying as the fall-guy. There were also various other payments to paparazzo media outlets. They were planning something rather damaging to your public image. We’re not sure what, precisely, but all the hallmarks are there.” Jasmine replied.

“Very well. Notify Saris to cease distribution of item 4-5-Dorn-Krill-2-2-1, until further notice.” He replied, gazing up at the floor indicator light just above the turbolift door.

“Roger. Wilco. Should I prepare for a hasty return to Mattock?” she asked.

“Negative. I think this little cold war has gone quite far enough. I will broker a truce.” Thran replied.

“Peace? You’re going soft, old man.” She replied.

“My daughter, you still have so much to learn. The prudent warrior knows that ensured mutual destruction is far too large a cost to preserve one’s personal honor. There is no victory in complete ruin.” He said, ever instructing his unofficial apprentice.

 “Understood. Be cautious though, something is not quite as it seems. Over and out.” The communicator clicked off.

He drew in a deep breath, preparing for whatever may face him on the other side of the turbolift door. Nearly one thousand three hundred meters above the landing pad, the turbolift finally came to a rest. The magnetolocks on the doors clicked and they slid open. As he had expected, a welcoming party had been prepared. Though, he was surprised by its limited number of volunteers.

A solitary and particularly rotund Pantoran awaited him with a large grin and unblinking eyes. The Proconsul was clad in his finest dress uniform and he nervously wringed his hands together. Thran glanced to either side of the exit of the turbolift before stepping forward into the pinnacle chambers of Adironam Tower.

“Ah, Master Occasus. What a welcomed surprise! To what do we owe the pleasure of your rather unexpected visit?” Raleien said with a wavering voice.

“Do I make you nervous, Blueberry?” Thran replied.

“Nervous is perhaps not the right word, but perhaps overflowing with excitement of being able to formally welcome you this day.” The old stormtrooper replied, pulling back his slick white hair over his ear.

“I’ve come to speak with Kamjin. We have many things to discuss.” The Sith Replied, lowering his hand to his lightsaber.

“Oh, I am afraid the Consul is not in at the moment. Coincidentally, I happen to be the only person here at the moment. Perhaps you and I might find some solace in each other’s company until the Consul returns?” the Pantoran said, gesturing towards his quarters.

Emotion, like stones tossed into a still body of water, send waves out through The Force. Those who are trained to see such turbulence can pick up on intention and desire with ease. Occasus had made a career of anticipating the desires of others and exploiting them to his own gain. The feeling radiating from the Pantoran was one he had felt many times before, with Banker’s girlfriends, cocktail waitresses, dancing girls, and even his own wife.

Like a lightning strike, clarity hit the Warlord. The oddities that had been sent to him as gifts were all tangential to interests and hobbies catalogued in his personal file of Clan Scholae Palatinae. Many of the items made perfect sense; the bottles of rare wine, the oil painting of his own visage, the rare model of TIE Fighter. Few people would have had access to this record and it was perhaps out of date. He stared at the cerulean hued skin of the former Stormtrooper and the green stained corners of his thin lips.

“Raleien. Look at me.” He said.

“Look at you? How could I not? Such a handsome man...” the Proconsul replied clutching his hands to his chin.

“This...is not healthy behavior. It is unbecoming of a Proconsul.” Thran stated.

“Love makes us do crazy things, Thran.” The viceroy replied, with a wide eyed and frightening stare.

“Raleien, you are not in love with me. Kamjin has been twisting your mind. He is using you as a weaponized distraction in our little spat. Think about it...This affection began shortly after your return from our foray into the Temple, where Kamjin suffered a great deal of humiliation at my hands. He decided he was going to escalate our personal rivalry and your loyalty to him was so easily exploitable.” Thran said, backing towards the turbolift.

“No... That’s impossible. I love you.” Raleien said behind cold blank eyes.

“Viceroy, look within yourself. You know that’s not true. You don’t even particularly like me. You certainly don’t trust me. How can one love without trust?” Thran said, radiating forth waves of darkened influence with each word.

“No...I do love you.” Raleien said, taking a step forward. “At least give me some of your hair, so I can clone you. Please, I’ve earned that much.”

Like a pouncing predator, the fat Pantoran sprung onto Thran. He wrapped him in an embrace, attempting to land a kiss on the human’s lips. The struggle between the two men was brief. Occasus managed to free himself from the obsessive Proconsul’s grip with relative ease. He freed his lightsaber from his belt and rose to his feet. The flame-colored blade crack-fizzed to life, letting out a shrieking howl as it ionized the air immediately around the beam of plasma. The Warlord was prepared to strike down the loyalist soldier when salvation came at the sound of the opening of the turbolift doors.

“Ah, Thran...Pleased to see you,” Kamjin said, wryly. “Though I suspect not as pleased as my Proconsul is.”

“Kamjin.” Thran wheeled about, aiming his lightsaber at the Elder. “I’ve instructed my people to cease publication of the posters. You’ve gone too far with this...Bring an end to this madness. I’ve had my fun, I see now that you are not a man to be trifled with.”

The Consul looked up at the closed-circuit camera which had overseen the prior exchange. He tugged at the ends of his slate grey Admiral’s tunic, straightening his uniform. He slung the blood red cloak over his shoulder, resting his hand on his hip. The pair of Sith stared at each other for a moment. Kamjin was waiting for the younger man to lash out. It never came.

“Very well.” Kamjin said with a devilish smile. “I am pleased that you’ve stopped your libelous campaign against me. You’ll have to bear his adoration for some time. It will take some time to repair his psyche. I have to say, this might be some of my best work. He really believes he loves you. You really should see the obscene shrine he’s constructed. It is quite the sight.”

“I’ve seen quite enough already, Kam. Thank you.” Thran said, deactivating his lightsaber.

“Excellent. Well now that you’ve come to your senses, perhaps we can find a means of cooperation between us. Let’s call it a symbol of our mutual respect and cessation of hostilities between leaders of the Clan.” Kamjin said.

“What did you have in mind?” Occasus inquired.

The Adept extended his other hand. A small holographic projector displayed an image. The symbol was unmistakable; the sickle-like heraldry of Clan Taldryan. Occasus glared at image a moment, old wounds from long forgotten battles began to ache again. Many had forgotten the enemies of old, but the Warlord still bore the hatred for them deep within.

“Go on. I am listening.” Thran said, holding Raleien at bay with a stiffened arm.