

“I want him on a spit,” Kamjin roared.

“With barbeque sauce!” the Viceroy added.

The summit between the venerable Clan Taldryan and the imperial Clan Scholae Palatinae had gone sideways before discussions even began. An oversight in menu planning had offended the delicate sensibilities of the Taldryan Proconsul. Someone, it seemed, had either deliberately changed the menu or the ever-plotting Kamjin Lap’lamiz’s memory was fading with age. The unwittingly belligerent instance of cannibalism had resulted in an instantaneous melee, the result of which was the joining of two arcane relics. The shattering energies from the convergence had fractured everyone’s memory. No one was quite certain of what had happened, but one thing was for certain when the parties were roused, the dawn of a new war was apparent.

Taldryan’s hasty retreat from the conference was followed by the Empire’s war council being summoned. It had been a number of years since direct hostilities between the Clans had been openly expressed. Those who had a predilection to the aggression of the past welcomed this opportunity. With a devious grin, Thran Occasus stood at the table waiting patiently to contribute to the growing war plan. The command center of the Imperial Star Destroyer Palpatine felt familiar and reminded him of his own tenure as de facto leader of the Empire in wars of old. He smiled to himself.

The Consul of Scholae Palatinae had experience as a Sector Admiral in a long forgotten Imperial Remnant, but emotion was clouding his better judgement. He’d already mustered the empire’s Fleet and with the eager advising of the Navy’s chief officers, they were preparing for a total engagement of the two clan fleets. The aggression fed by powerful emotion was blind and would result in catastrophic losses on both sides. If Scholae Palatinae could even emerge victorious, it would be at best a pyrrhic victory.

The Clan’s Naval officers were greatly inexperienced and they vastly underestimated the might of the forces they would encounter. On paper, the fleets of Clan Scholae Palatinae and Clan Taldryan were nearly evenly matched, but the presence of an additional Heavy Cruiser and an Interdictor tilted the scales in favor of the Taldrya brotherhood. They expected to catch the enemy fleet napping. Occasus shook his head. Undoubtedly, the message sent back to the Caelus system would have been to muster the fleet. They would be prepared for the Empire’s arrival. It would be a blood bath. The officers explained their hairbrained plan to its fullest before the Warlord spoke up.

“Might I suggest an alternative?” Thran said, his voice like soft velvet.

The men continued talking.

“Very well, after you’re all dead, bloated and floating through the vacuum of Taldya space, I will retake the Empire,” he said more assertively.

The threat of retaking the Imperial throne perked up Kamjin’s ears.

“Very well, Master Occasus...What do you have?” the Consul said.

“You want Teebu? I don’t particularly understand why, but that is neither here nor there. Your reasons are your own. The point is...There are more effective ways to achieve that and make Clan Taldryan pay

than bashing ourselves against their defenses. The Taldrya are as prideful as any of us, but they have this sort of creed of honor or whatever bullshit. That is exploitable,” the Sith said.

“Elaborate, Occasus. I have no patience for your theatrics,” the Viceroy chirped.

“The little furry one is also employed by the Regent. As agents of the Dark Council, both he and I have expressed orders to remain impartial in Clan matters. It’s simple, I will go to the Taldryan flagship and convince him to return to Arx with me, by order of the Regent. Only, we never go back to Arx. I bring him right back here. Then we ransom their Proconsul back to them or you sickos can fire up the infrared laser grill and feast away. Whatever you choose, but either way. It’s bing, bang, boom. Job’s done,” he replied, picking at his cuticles and clicking his tongue.

“I thought you were supposed to be impartial,” Raleien replied.

“Please, Raleien...don’t be so naïve. It is terribly off-putting. Do you really have that much to learn about dealing with Sith? Perhaps, you do. Maybe that is why Kamjin can so easily twist your mind to his will. I should mention there is some inherent risk in this plan. If the Dark Council finds out that we’ve invoked their name in a petty Clan disagreement, there will be repercussions. Likely only economic sanctions, but there is the slight risk that they see it as an overt attempt to bring the DC into open conflict and retaliate in kind. Three of the sitting Council members are Taldrya, after all,” Occasus said.

“Enough,” Kamjin replied, placing his hand on his chin as he remained pensive about the proposition. “Let me think.”

*If they should use Thran’s Plan, Turn to Page 5*

*If they should use Kamjin and the Naval Officers’ Plan, Turn to Page 4*

“Arx? Again?” she said.

“Yes. I have a very special task for you and the droid. Have it plot the course, then join me in the back...We’re moving on to the expert level courses in your training on deception,” Thran said, eyeballing the small BD-unit.

It let out a chirp and whirr, to which the girl smiled slightly. It was better that he did not know what the machine had said. She had taken a liking to it and had pilfered it from the inventory of Arx Capital Exchange. The social needs of a teenage girl were not met in their day-to-day life and the luxury of having a pet droid seemed to make her more amiable and less combative. The concession of having a droid routinely about his business, while not the preferred outcome, was one he was willing to make.

“No, Buddy. He does not know the difference between a BD-unit and an astromech. But, the location has been stored in the ship’s computer so it should be easy enough to access. You’ll just need to tell the Alium where to go, she’ll do the rest. And be polite. If he finds out you were rude to his ship, he’ll send both of us to the scrap heap,” She said, speaking to the diminutive exploratory droid.

Thran looked them up and down with a look of slight irritability. It always made him uncomfortable when people spoke to droids as if they were equals. He shook of the thought and moves to the back of passenger hold. He cleared a space and set out an array of tools, a holocamera and a holoprojector. He got to work.

The holoprojector displayed an image of the Regent, Zyxl Taldrya. With two hands he worked the holocamera and his datapad. He took sections of the various prerecorded messages and cut them from the context in which they had originally had been displayed. He alternated between taking snippets of the Regent’s messages and tapping in information on his datapad. The Shuttle jerked.

“HEY! CAREFUL UP THERE!” he yelled up to the cockpit.

“Just a little hiccup, Father. It’ll be smooth sailing from here. I promise,” Jasmine called.

Just then the shuttle rolled violently to the right. The Warlord’s gritted his teeth.

“Jasmine...” he growled.

“We’re good. No issues here. Everything is fine here. We’re good. How are you?” she replied.

“I swear it, girl. If there is so much as a scratch on this ship...” the Sith said threateningly.

Thran set aside his work for a moment. He debated returning to the cockpit, unsure if the droid and his daughter could manage the simple task of piloting the Lambda-class. He scratched the side of his head in deliberation.

*If Thran should pilot the Shuttle, Turn to page 11*

*If Thran should continue his plan, Turn to page 8*

“We will proceed with the naval assault,” Kamjin said. “Thran’s plan relies too much on...Thran. I will not allow the Empire to be pulled this way and that by his whims alone.”

“You’re a damn fool, Lap’lamiz. You will pay for your arrogance in blood. Gentlemen, ladies, I will take my leave. I refuse to be a victim of the emperor’s damaged pride and stupidity. Good luck...You’ll need it,” Thran said with a slight bow.

He turned on his heels and left the command center, bound for the Star Destroyer’s hangar. He cursed the emperor silently to himself even as the *Alium* slipped away from the Palatinaean fleet. He watched on the scanners as the CSP fleet took up a chevron formation and leapt off bound for war into the Caelus system. The Lambda-class shuttle pivoted as it prepared to leave realspace and leap into the safety of hyperspace.

The Scholae Palatinae fleet arrived at Caelus under a cannonade of turbolaser fire. The kyber-charged turbolasers of the *Axios* ripped apart the screening corvettes and frigates before turning its sight on the Empire’s flagship. The combined firepower of Scholae Palatinae’s heavy cruiser relentlessly pummeled the Taldryan Imperial Star Destroyer. The Turbolasers ripped open the hulk, shredding it to ribbons before splitting it in two. Swarms of fighters weaved and twisted together in massive scrums. As the Clans ripped each other to pieces, the watchful eye of the Dark Council arrived. They watched as thousands perished. Their presence was meant only to monitor, not to engage.

Within hours Thran was reading the reports from the Inquisitorius of open war in the Caelus systems. Both fleets were decimated. Eighty percent casualties on both sides. He shook his head. The once proud Empire had finally fallen. There weren’t even enough pieces to pick up and rebuild. Years of Machiavellian machinations had been wasted. He looked through the report and found the only silver lining he could; at least Taldryan had been destroyed too. The life of his beloved Empire was a grand price to pay for the destruction of the age-old enemy.

“What a damn shame...” he said to himself.

*END*

“Very well,” Kamjin said. “What do you need from us, Thran?”

“Prep my shuttle. Leave the rest to me,” the Bakuran said with a smile.

Kamjin depressed a button on the holotable. A small red light indicated the channel was open.

“Leftenant, please prepare the Praetor’s Shuttle for immediate departure,” the Consul said.

It was wise to refer to the Sith by his role in the Regent’s office. Creating separation at this level would hamper any investigation that may come later. If those who were most likely to be questioned by the Inquisitorius believed the lies, they would relay them as truth. Thran smirked to himself.

“Well, Gentlemen and ladies, it appears as though now is the appropriate time for me to bid you adieu. Farewell, and best of luck to you in your ventures,” this Sith turned on his heels and strode out of the command center.

He left them behind to discuss what possible treachery he could be planning and what contingencies should be enacted upon revelation of his deceit. Thran placed no blame on them for doing so. Half an ounce of prudence among the dozen would alert them to the possibility that they were being played from within. He would do the same were he in their position.

Gliding through the trapezoidal corridors of the Imperial-II class Star Destroyer, he made his way towards the hangar bay. The hustle and bustle of a naval ship preparing for war was a sight to see. Imperial Marines, marching the corridors with their perfectly white armor, passed him by. A scurrying mouse droid was nearly squashed underfoot as he reached the turbolift. The disgruntled whistle from the droid alerted him to the small robot’s displeasure with nearly being stepped on. As the turbolift doors opened, he retrieved a small communicator from the belt of his robes.

“Jasmine, we’re leaving. Warm up the Alium and ask that blasted droid of yours to plot a course,” he said.

“You got it. Where are we headed?” the young woman asked.

“I haven’t decided yet,” The Warlord said.

“How is Buddy to plot a course if you don’t know where we’re going?” she replied.

“We’ll discuss this further when I am on board,” He replied, pressing the button to close the doors.

He stood alone in his thoughts for a moment. This plan would work, but it would need to be executed with perfection. The Taldrya would be expecting something and if a single piece was out of place, it would be him that was up for ransom. Even the vector from which he joined the Taldryan clan in the first phase of his plan would be scrutinized. Every step and every word would be measured by micrometers. While he was certainly up for the challenge, where Clan Taldryan had the honor to retrieve one of their own, Clan Scholae Palatinae had a terrible streak of ruthlessness. They would not perhaps come to his aid should his plan run afoul. His fate was in the hands of his own cunning.

This lift stopped with a nearly silent hum, broken by a subtle bell noting its arrival at the intended destination. He stepped from the claustrophobic turbolift into the openness of the hangar. He traversed the polished floor, counting each step. This information would serve him well in their infiltration. The Warlord pondered in the last moments if he should go directly to the Caelus system or if a diversion was

prudent. He was still uncertain. He reached the Lambda-class Shuttle at last. As if being consumed by the vessel itself, he stepped up the loading ramp as if walking to a gaping mouth. Once aboard, he climbed into the cockpit where Jasmine awaited him.

“So, where to?” she asked

*If Thran says “Plot a course for the Caelus system” turn to page 7*

*If Thran says “Plot a course for the Arx system” turn to page 3*

The Alium jerked as it returned to realspace. The stars spun as the vessel rolled and yawed, pointing its nose towards the Taldryan flag ship. The entire orbit of Kasiya was filled with the combined Naval might of Clan Taldryan.

“Unidentified Shuttle. You have entered the sovereign space of Clan Taldryan. Identify yourself,” a voice came over the shuttle’s communication channel.

“Transmitting identification, Axios,” Thran said, swallowing hard.

The realization that he had not completed all the necessary steps in crafting the illusion of his plan sat in his throat. Thran adjusted the shuttle’s power settings and prepared himself to exhibit some execute some serious flying. The Taldryan would see through the ruse immediately.

“DIE SCHOLAE SCUM!” came Teebu’s squeaking voice over the comm.

Flashes of green hued laser fire filled the entire viewscreen of the shuttle’s cockpit. Occasus grabbed the yoke and tossed the Lambda-Class shuttle into a spin. The pilot’s honed vision caught the swarm of fighters emerging from the launch bay of the Taldryan flagship. As skilled as he was as a pilot, there would be no escape this time.

The shuttle twisted about, finding the nearest escape vector. He punched some numbers into the shuttle’s computer, hoping to escape the angry hornet’s nest of fighters. As he squeezed the hyperdrive motivator toggles together, the shuttles sensors erupted with a claxon. The outline of a delta-shaped Immobilizer-418 was emitting waves of gravitational energy. The shuttle could not jump to safety.

Thran weaved the lumbering vessel back and forth through alternating barrages of laser fire from the Taldryan TIE Defenders. The concentric circles around the Lambda’s silhouette present on the shield display ticked from white, to green, to yellow, to red. When they vanished, the Lambda-class shuttle Alium was torn apart. Teebu watched with a sickening grin as the shuttle was left smoldering in space.

“Excellent. Send a message to Clan Scholae Palatinae. Thran Occasus is dead,” Appius said, stepping forward beside his Proconsul.

*END.*

After several minutes of wobbly flight, the Alium did finally steady. As the shuttle sprung from realspace into hyperspace, bound for the Arx System, Jasmine came down from the Shuttle's flightdeck. She laughed a little to herself, hoping that her father would not be too upset over her and Buddy's lack of piloting skill.

"Glad you got that sorted out," he said, looking up from his datapad.

"He's not a pilot-droid and you normally fly for us..." the girl replied, swiping a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Sit down. I need your hands on this holocamera, while I adjust the image on my datapad," he commanded.

"What are you doing?" she asked, slipping her legs under her as she came to rest beside him on the shuttle's floor.

"Fabricating a message from the Regent. We're going to get Teebu from the Taldrya," he said.

"Fabricating a...Zyxl will have your head for that. Please tell me this is the first time you've done this," she replied.

"Ok. This is the first time I've done this," he replied, rolling his eyes.

"Oh my...You've got to be KIDDING me..." She wanted to scold him, but curiosity was getting the better of her. "Why...What...How are you doing that?" she fumbled on her words as she watched his deft hand craft an entirely new message from the clips he had taken.

"Jasmine, my love...Ninety percent of the drama you see in holofilms is done on the cutting room floor. The editors are the magic makers," He replied, focused intently on his work. "Now hold that camera and watch me work. The key to all of this is making this message sound believable. The trick, my love, to expert level deception is in the mundane. Take Zyxl...I could just cut the words into what I want it to say, blend the motion together and we're good...But that is not believable. You have to think of the mundane, like how when the Regent has a sense of urgency, he does that little head tic. It's subtle, just to the right. I will admit, the fact he's always wearing that stupid horned helmet makes this a much easier edit. But, if I were to leave that out, it wouldn't feel real. Move the camera up, about a half inch. Lies, my dear, are bought or caught in the mundane. One could say the most grandiose tales, but if they did it boringly enough or with just the right inflection, no one would be the wiser. To the left, an inch," he said, all the while working away on the datapad.

Jasmine had been spending much time with her father and at every junction, with every lesson, he continued to surprise her. She found his motivation dubious at times, but she admired him. Under all the layers she was peeling back, she could see the genius within him. It would be easy to assume that he was a vacuous man, full of ego and pride with little room for anything else. Their lessons had taught her otherwise. Not only was he so able in deception as to steal from the Master at Arms or the Fist, he'd made a career out of deceiving the entire galaxy. He made it easy for people to believe him. In every film, he transformed into a new character, and yet, when out of those characters and doing interviews or press he was still playing a role. She felt honored, in a way, that she was coming to know the man



underneath all of the lies. She was inspired by his willpower, his cunning, and his passion for what he did.

The pair tinkered with the recording for the majority of the trip to Arx. They were interrupted by Buddy, who peered down on them from the elevated cockpit, tilting his boxy lensed face as he watched the pair bonding over his grand plan. The droid let out a series of clicks, whirrs and beeps. Jasmine looked up.

“He says we’re approaching Arx, Dad,” she relayed.

“Very well, tell it to adjust the ships beacon to the Arx Capital Exchange official registry number and plot a course to the Caelus system,” Thran replied, standing from his seat on the floor.

“You heard him,” Jasmine said.

“Good,” he replied. “Let’s get up there and run through the plan one more time.”

He stepped forward, pulling himself up into the cockpit with the droid. The Warlord sat at the helm. The Journey from Arx to the Caelus system would be a quick one. An unmarked hyperspace lane had been established from Arx to every Clan home system, enacted as a contingency, should a Clan require the aid of the Iron Throne. They were to be used for official business only. That was the illusion they were selling. The routes were mostly unmonitored and he could concoct a reason for their use later. He had to get to Caelus and Teebu, before Kamjin grew too impatient.

*Turn to Page 10*

The vessel adjusted course, aiming towards the Taldrya homeworld, and in a blink leapt into the swirling blue vortex of hyperspace. The journey was indeed short. They ran through the game plan again. Thran would land the Alium, board the Taldrya vessel, gather Teebu and they would leave. It seemed simple. What could go wrong?

As the field of white and blue turned back to the pinpricks of light found in realspace, the massed Taldrya fleet sat before them. The battle lines were drawn up, each ship had been placed in a configuration that was reminiscent of the Empire's tactics. He admired it for a moment. The fleet was respectable.

A message came over the speaker in the cockpit.

"Unidentified shuttle. You have entered the sovereign space of Clan Taldryan. State your business and transmit clearance codes," Came the starched voice of a naval officer.

"Axios flight command, codes have been transmitted. This is the Shuttle Alium, vessel of the Praetor to the Regent. Requesting permission to board the Axios. The Praetor has business with the Magistrate, by order of the Regent directly," Thran said, depressing a button to transmit the data parcel that contained their clearance code.

"Stand-by, Alium," The officer replied.

Surely the officer was alerting the high command of Clan Taldryan to his presence. Thran pondered a moment if they should continue their flight path or if they should start improvising. Improvisation would require a great deal of skill on his part. While he loved the Alium, she lacked the nimbleness of his TIE Defender. Venture too close to the Taldryan ships and they would certainly open fire or remain stationary and be a sitting bantha when they decided to open fire anyway. He was unsure how to proceed.

*If Thran should continue "flying casually", turn to page 18*

*If Thran should show patience for once, turn to page 12*

“Damnit, Jasmine. You have been skipping your simulator sessions, haven’t you!” Thran said.

He pushed aside the task he was working on and made his way into the cockpit. As he took his typical spot in the pilot’s chair, he pushed the BD-unit from the co-pilot’s chair. His frustration was visible. The droid clanged against the floor, then scurried out of sight.

“How many times have I told you that skipping your lessons is lazy. Laziness is how you get caught. I am beyond angry with you,” The warlord scolded.

“I’m sorry, Father. I’m just not as inter-“ Jasmine began.

“ENOUGH. It’s always excuses with you, girl. You’re undisciplined. Your head is always in the clouds. It will be the death of you,” Thran said.

Jasmine slunk away from the cockpit and into the passenger cabin. After nearly an hour, Thran’s rage had subsided. He finally emerged behind her. Standing over her as she tinkered with the BD-Unit. The Warlord looked down at her displeased. The Sith went over his plan with his daughter. It was simple, they would walk aboard the Taldryan vessel and walk off the vessel with Teebu in hand.

After he was certain that she knew what to do, he stepped back up into the cockpit of the shuttle. He stewed in his disappointment and anger for the remainder of the journey. The shuttle arrived at Arx. He augmented the vessel’s registration keys, which had become a routine process. His fingers drifted over the command controls, inputting the Caelus System as the destination in the hyperspace computer. The journey there would be short.

*TURN TO PAGE 10*

Thran silently pushed the throttle down and the shuttle came to a rest. The Taldryan Navy was running comprehensive scans of the shuttle. He took no action to prevent their inspection. His attention to detail in selling their deception would pay off. Coming to the Taldryan home system alone, re-routing to Arx, coming to Caelus via the restricted hyperlanes, changing the Lambda-class shuttle's active registration numbers. These were just the beginning of the grand illusion.

Jasmine sat silently with him for nearly two minutes, the only sounds coming from the BD-unit as it crawled up into her lap. The Warlord held up his hand, counting down as he folded each finger with the passing seconds. As the last digit folded into his palm, the stoic voice of the naval officer came over the shuttle's communication channel.

"Shuttle Alium. Clearance granted. Proceed to Axios hangar One-Aurek."

"Roger, Wilco. Thank you, Axios," Thran replied.

Silently they navigated the craft towards the underside of the Taldryan vessel. The Shuttle drifted through the vast emptiness of space. The shadow of the massive warship occluded the light from the sun and hid the local constellations behind a field of durasteel that occupied the entire viewscreen of the Lambda-class shuttle. He turned to Jasmine for a brief moment.

"Get the droid to record images of the Axios' turbolasers. They have been modified in some way. We'll want to make notes of this for later," He said.

"You do know you can talk to Buddy directly, right?" she said.

The droid let out a string of clicks, whistles and beeps. It cocked its head back and forth at the Sith Warlord, before complying with the command. The small exploratory droid hopped up onto the command panel, hopping between the blank spaces to find a reasonable place from which its single optical device could record the exterior topography of the Taldrya vessel's improved weapons systems.

The shadows which had been cast over the shuttle as it swept under the ventral side of the massive delta-shaped battleship were only broken when they reached the hangar bay. There was a bright and sterile light emitting from the craterous landing bay, it illuminated the whole of the shuttle. It was a welcome sight. From this angle the Star Destroyer would be incapable of firing upon them and it signified that another hurdle had been successfully leapt. The shuttle slowed and the soft whir of the vessel's s-foil actuators indicated that they had commenced the landing procedure. The vessel yawed, one hundred and twenty degrees, lining it perfectly parallel with the landing berths in the hangar bay. The shuttle glided forward landing in a central space set out in the hangar floor.

As the shuttle's landing gear took up the weight of the vessel, puffs of condensing air released through ports in the vessel's exterior. The shuttle had repressurized to its new surroundings and the loading ramp began descending from under the main hull of the shuttle. Thran stood from the pilot's seat, climbing down into the passenger cabin. He peaked down the loading ramp to see if he could estimate the armed contingent of Taldryan soldiers that would form their "welcoming party". There were many.

He adjusted the collar on his robes and took a deep breath. He looked back at Jasmine, silently relaying assurances that all would go according to plan. The Force opened to him and he attempted to locate their quarry. To his surprise, both Teebu and Appius had already entered the hangar and were walking towards the waiting shuttle. They would wait for them to be in place before disembarking. Standard

Regent's Office protocol was not to disembark until the proper authorities had arrived to welcome the office's agents aboard. It was a formality, but sticking to these formalities was important for official business. With their grand trick ready to spring, now was not the time to break from completing the little things that sold their lies.

"Remember, Teebu knows you. But that will not stop him from doubting our intention. They will try to scour your mind. Steel yourself and do not let them in. Act annoyed or frustrated that we had to complete this menial task. Are you ready?" He asked.

"Yes, Father," She said, shaking herself slightly and crossing her arms over her chest.

"Right. Let's do this," Thran said, before taking his first steps down the loading ramp.

The Taldryan soldiers had taken up a half-moon formation at the bottom of the loading ramp. This was not the traditional row and column formation a military guard would take up when welcoming an official on such important matters. The arrangement of soldiers was a defensive position, wherein they could all concentrate fire on the loading ramp. Their rifles were at the ready. Occusus looked at each of the soldiers as he stepped down the incline. He counted them. Twenty-four.

At the central apex of the formation, a fully armored Mandalorian in candy-apple red Beskar'gam and his half-pint Ewok Proconsul stood awaited the Praetor. Both were alert, ready to strike at the earliest sign of aggression from their visitors. Jasmine followed Thran, several paces behind him, also inspecting the welcoming party.

"I'll kindly ask your men to stand down, Consul," Thran said. "Such disrespect would not be extended to the Regent, and accordingly it should not be extended to those who are here at his will."

"Silence, Palpatine. You and your kin will pay for your actions," Teebu growled, being held back from violence only by Appius' presence.

"Magistrate, I will ask you but once to watch your tone. I am truly apologetic for the lack of civility and common decency shown to you by the summit of Clan Scholae Palatinae. I do not come here on their accord. It is no secret that I hold no allegiance to Lap'Lamiz or his Viceroy. I left the Caperion System shortly after you did. I have come at Zyx's command. As agents of the Office of the Regent, we are bound to remain neutral in matters between clans. What Clan Taldryan does after we leave is no business of mine," Thran said.

"Zyx's command?" Appius said, puzzled by the Warlord's word choice.

Thran turned his eyes to the T-shaped slot in the Mandalorian's helmet. He looked the man up and down a moment. The man was clearly a warrior and his Beskar armor would make it difficult to best him in combat.

"Master Wight, allow me to explain in terms you may understand. When the Regent asks something of his Praetor, I am normally happy to oblige. However, when the Regent asks me to meet face to face with an old enemy, there is a substantial conflict. When I will not oblige his requests, he will issue commands. I will not mince my words. I hold only hatred for Clan Taldryan, earned on many battlefields long ago. It is not willfully that I stand here. I put aside that hatred to do as the Regent has

commanded...No matter how...demeaning...this fetch quest is," Thran said, turning his nose up in disgust.

"Bite your tongue, Mir'osik," the Consul said in his native tongue.

"My business with you is finished, Mandalorian. Teebu Nyrrire, by order of the Regent you are to return with me to Arx. There are matters that we must attend to. Your presence is required," Thran said, turning to the Ewok Proconsul.

The small furry creature puffed himself up. The nerve it took for the Sith to march into their territory and demand that Teebu set aside his personal vendetta against Clan Scholae Palatinae infuriated him. He grumbled and growled.

"I know you, Occasus. You know not the meaning of truth. Your mouth opens and all that comes forth is falsehoods! If ZyxI wanted me to return to Arx, he would have sent a message," The Ewok said in chittering Basic.

Thran readied himself to unleash a lashing of words on the Taldrya, but just as the first sounds mustered in his throat, the voice of his daughter chirped over his shoulder.

"Oh, for frack's sake Teebu..." she said. "Take a seat, boys. This pissing contest is going to take a minute," She hollered at the soldiers.

The sight of the girl caught Teebu off guard. She had been like Thran's shadow in all Regent affairs and when he left to attend to personal matters, she was left in charge of his affairs around the Arx Capital Exchange. She slumped down onto the ramp of the shuttle and sighed. Teebu stamped his small furry feet on the floor of the hangar.

"Proof. Give us proof," Teebu squeaked.

"Very well," Thran said, extending his hand to reveal a small holoprojector.

"Teebu," ZyxI's voice was unmistakable. "I have sent Thran to retrieve you. I attempted to send this message to you directly, but you have not responded. I am sure the heat of the situation has your attention split. With that said, the hostilities that have presented themselves between the Clans pose a significant threat to the Dark Council's interest in these systems. You are to remove yourself from this conflict and return to Arx. We have several matters which require your immediate attention and I cannot stand by idly while you drag the legitimacy of your post through the mud. I am certain my Praetor looks quite displeased at the moment and as enjoyable as that may be for both of us, I assure you he acts on my words not his own," The message stated.

*If Thran piloted the ship to Arx Turn to page 17*

*If Thran continued to work on his forgery of the Regent's message turn to page 15*

“Very well, Occasus. I will come with you. Our forces determined that your vessel’s point of origin was Arx, it also appears you used the official DC hyperlane. Your ship was scanned on landing. The message you brought from the Regent was the last bit of proof we needed. I can tell by the surprise on your face that you didn’t expect Clan Taldryan to have such a comprehensive net to vet your intentions,” The Proconsul said with a toothy grin.

“It is indeed impressive. Now, if you would please, we must hasten back to Arx,” Thran said, trying not to smirk to himself.

Thran cast one last evil eye at the Taldryan Consul. Deep in his soul he wanted to strike the Mandalorian down and disrupt the entire command structure of the Taldrya. He tossed a nod to the man and turned back to the Shuttle’s loading ramp. Accompanied by Teebu, he entered the passenger hold. As they passed Jasmine, she raised a hand and tossed a cheeky wave at the Taldryan soldiers.

“Buh-bye,” she said, rising to her feet to follow the Regent’s staff aboard the Alium.

The loading ramp actuated, raising up and obscuring the vessel’s interior. No sooner than the ramp closed did Teebu instantly sense the danger he was in. Occasus turned to him, his hands contorted and arcing rays of electricity sprung from his fingertips. His muscles tensed, jerking and flexing as the electricity ran through his body.

He let out a squeal, but the sealed hull of the vessel prevented any sound from escaping. Jasmine grabbed her father’s E-11D and flipped the switch on the carbine’s pistol grip activating the stun mode. She fired at the Ewok. His smoldering body went limp. Thran smiled and ceased his arcane torture. He turned and climbed up into the cockpit of the shuttle, tossing a pair of binders down to his daughter.

“Well done, my love. Lock him up and put him in a crate,” Thran said.

He settled into the pilot’s seat. The Lambda-class shuttle lifted from the hangar bay of the Taldryan Flagship, skating freely into the void of space. The folding wings locked in their downward facing transit position and the shuttle roared off into the nothingness. They passed through the picket lines of the fleet and encountered no interference. Occasus brought up the ship’s computer and quickly tapped in the coordinates of a system set for a predetermined rendezvous location.

The shuttle slipped into hyperspace. He secured Teebu’s unconscious form within a sealed crate, sealing it with a lock and a hand written note reading “To Kamjin, with love. – Thran” When the vessel rejoined the calm of real space, the view screen was again filled by the hulking form of an Imperial Star Destroyer. He opened a communication link to the vessel.

“Star Destroyer Palpatine, Shuttle Alium requesting permission to land. We’re carrying the Consul’s supper,” he said with a smile.

“Thran...Well done,” Kamjin’s voice came over the commlink.

“I hope you’re pleased, Emperor. Perhaps, now that I offer such a precious item, we can negotiate the terms of the exclusive development rights of the Elayan continent on Seraph,” Thran replied.

“I should have known that this plan would not be executed out of the kindness of your heart. Regardless, for bringing me what I wanted, you will have your sit down. Bring the Ewok directly to the Galley and we will talk,” The Emperor said.

*END*



“THIS MESSAGE IS A COMPLETE FABRICATION! KILL THEM!” the Ewok squawked.

The soldiers raised their rifles. A hellfire of blaster bolts filled the air. The Warlord and his apprentice daughter drew their lightsabers. A few of the bolts were deflected, but the overwhelming volume of fire struck Thran and Jasmine all over their bodies. The two collapsed onto the deck, dead.

Teebu let out an evil cackle and kicked the corpse of the Warlord.

“Excellent. Send a message to Clan Scholae Palatinae. Thran Occasus is dead,” Appius said, stepping forward beside his Proconsul.

*END*

Thran would never surrender to the demands of Clan Taldryan. His hatred for them was too rich. He did not comply with their orders to stand down.

“Dad, what are you doing?” Jasmine asked.

“I’m just going to continue flying casual. They won’t do anything,” He said confidently.

“Shuttle Alium. Arrest your flight or this will be considered an act of aggression and we will be forced to fire on you,” The officer said.

“Can it Taldrya trash...Don’t you know who I am? I am Thran Occasus-Palpatine!” the Warlord boasted.

“DIE SCHOLAE SCUM!” came Teebu’s squeaking voice over the comm.

Flashes of green-hued laser fire filled the entire viewscreen of the shuttle’s cockpit. Occasus grabbed the yoke and tossed the Lambda-Class shuttle into a spin. The pilot’s honed vision caught the swarm of fighters emerging from the launch bay of the Taldryan flagship. As skilled as he was as a pilot, there would be no escape this time.

The shuttle twisted about, finding the nearest escape vector. He punched some numbers into the shuttle’s computer, hoping to escape the angry hornet’s nest of fighters. As he squeezed the hyperdrive motivator toggles together, the shuttle’s sensors erupted with a claxon. The outline of a delta-shaped Immobilizer-418 was emitting waves of gravitational energy. The shuttle could not jump to safety.

Thran weaved the lumbering vessel back and forth through alternating barrages of laser fire from the Taldryan TIE Defenders. The concentric circles around the Lambda’s silhouette present on the shield display ticked from white, to green, to yellow, to red. When they vanished, the Lambda-class Shuttle Alium was torn apart. Teebu watched with a sickening grin as the Shuttle left smoldering in space.

“Excellent. Send a message to Clan Scholae Palatinae. Thran Occasus is dead,” Appius said, stepping forward beside his Proconsul.

*END*