

## *Hammer Fall*

Classified System

A forest close by to the Fortified

Bunker, near the Ewok farm

Classified Planet

40 ABY

I see and feel the evil

My hands will crush 'em all!

You think you have the answers.

I'll laugh and watch you fall.

Black-hearted evil

Brave-hearted hero

I am all, I am all, I am

*I Am... All of Me*, By Crush 40

An early morning soft wind blew gently across the top of a tall hill, lightly stirring the branches of the nearby trees as it playfully tussled the hair and cloak of a figure sitting on a fallen log.

"What are you doing out here?" A familiar feminine voice called out from behind the figure.

"Just reading," Xendar replied, not looking up from the datapad. He watched out from the corner of his eye as Oriyanna placed her helmet on the log next to him. He heard the creak of her armor and felt her arms gently encircle his neck and shoulders.

"Oh, like what?" She said as she placed her chin on his shoulder.

Xendar brought the pad up for her to read.

"Clan Taldryan personnel files?" Oriyanna stated in a questioning tone.

"They managed to pull several operations against us making us look like inept fools. The first time was aboard the ship where we took Tebuu Nyrrire. And the second happened here on the planet. Where they posed as crash survivors and fed us false information about Nyrrire and a crashed ship. At the same time, they managed to hijack the transport ship carrying the captured prisoners and Ewoks. The only person that did not look like a complete fool was Reiden and his team. As they transported their prisoners aboard their ship." Xendar said.

"Lord Reiden is also an independent operator. So, I don't think that..." Oriyanna started to say as the loud snapping of a branch breaking interrupted the conversation.

Oriyanna stood up and whipped around in the direction that the snap had come from. Her hands shot down and pulled her DC-15s's out of their holsters and brought them up to the ready.

"It's alright," Xendar said, still looking down at the datapad. "It's your father." Then raising his head up, "Okay, Jasten. You can come on over; nothing is going on," Xendar said, turning his head in the direction that the sound of the snapping branch had come from.

Oriyanna noticed a slight shimmering by one of the nearby trees. It began to take the vague shape of a humanoid figure. Which then became a figure in Katarn Night-Ops Armor.

"Dad," Oriyanna said, the relief pouring out of her voice as she holstered her pistols.

"I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't interrupting anything," Jasten said with a slow drawl as he removed his helmet, revealing a human face that didn't look much older than Oriyanna or Xendar.

"No, nothing at all," Oriyanna stated.

"Oh, okay. Anyway, I came out looking for you two. Apparently, the word is being passed around that the command staff are going to be giving mission briefings in ten minutes.

As if to add to the validity of Jasten's claim, all three of their comlinks went off simultaneously.

"Attention, all units of Scholae Palatinae," a voice called out. "Report to your assigned commander for the mission briefing. Pilots; report to Lord Thrane in Docking Bay One. Mercenaries and independent contractors; Report to Lord Reiden in Docking Bay Two. Standard special operations units; report to Commander Sonavarret in Docking Bay Three. Elite special operations units and lower-level force users; report to Lord Aldaric and Lord Archangel in the Command Situation Room. High-level force users; report to the emperor in the throne room."

"Well, that answers that," Jasten stated. Then looking over at Xendar and Oriyanna, "I'll go wait over there and give you two a couple of minutes," he said as he started to walk away.

Reaching down, Oriyanna grabbed her helmet off the log, she then turned toward Xendar.

"This seems a bit familiar," she said, smiling wryly. She leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. "I guess I will be seeing you later." Xendar reached forward and grabbed her hand as she started to walk away, pulling her back toward him. "That was not a goodbye kiss," Xendar said. "This is a goodbye kiss," Xendar said, pulling Oriyanna into an intensely passionate kiss.

Oriyanna's helmet clattered on the ground as she stood stunned for a very brief moment. Then, wrapping her arms around Xendar, she returned his kiss with the same passion and intensity that Xendar had given her. As the two of them stood there, feeling the emotions of the other, then sending and sharing those emotions with the other person. For Xendar and Oriyanna. It was these small moments that always seemed to have the most impact. And for Oriyanna, she never grew tired of the roller coaster ride of their emotions. After a brief moment, the two separated.

"Your right; that was a goodbye kiss," she said, smiling as she leaned against Xendar.

"I love you," she said quietly.

"I love you too," Xendar replied.

Stepping slowly out of Xendar's embrace, "I had better get to that briefing with Commander Sonavarret," Oriyanna said as she bent down and picked up her helmet. After putting it on, she took off at a brisk jog for the entrance to the bunker.

"Well, I guess we had better get going as well," Jasten said as he walked up to Xendar.

"I thought that Oriyanna's SPAR Team was considered an elite unit," Xendar said as he started to walk toward the bunker entrance.

"It is, but they have to earn their stripes just like everyone else. If they perform well in this hidden war we are fighting, they could earn that distinction," Jasten stated.

"Sometimes, these hidden skirmishes are more of a pain to fight in than they are actually worth," Xendar added.

"While these fights can be annoying. For me, and what I have gotten out of life. I can't complain. There have been a few things that made it all worthwhile," Jasten said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Like what?" Xendar asked.

"Well, it's different for each person. But for me, there have been several. Two of them happened three months after I had finished basic training. I had just turned seventeen, and I was on a combined arms training mission. That's where I met the team that would help found the *Night Wraiths*, and one of the most important events in my life happened; I met Deshavara. And the following year, we got married. And when I turned thirty, I became the commander of the newly formed *Night Wraiths* and became the proud father of a beautiful baby girl. So, for the last thirty-seven years. I have had no complaints."

"Deshavara was a hundred and thirty-six when you two got married? I had figured at that age; she would have been a much wiser Falleen woman than that to fall for a dumb kid like you," Xendar said dryly.

"Oh, that's cute, real cute," Jasten said, giving Xendar a flat look.

"But in all honesty, I understand where you are going with this, and I do appreciate it," Xendar said as they reached a bank of turbolifts.

"Nice talking to ya kid, see ya around," Jasten said, smiling as he stepped into the turbolift.

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"I will not waste anyone's time bandying about with useless idle talk. There is a problem, and I want it dealt with," The Emperor said quietly.

"Clan Taldryan will soon be launching an attack on this bunker; they will be using their newly recruited Ewok allies as the main assault against us. Your job is simple; you are to rid us of these pests. You are free to use whatever methods you wish to eliminate them. I will tell you this; as a warning, you are to kill the Ewoks only, not the Taldryans, as they will make excellent hostages. And secondly, you are to hold position and do not attack until the order is given. The penalty for failure to heed either of these warnings will be most dire indeed! All other information that you may require has been sent to your datapad. Now, onward! For the glory of Scholae Palatinae!"

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*A perfect killing zone*, Xendar thought to himself as he stood in the tree line at the base of the hill, obscured from sight and shrouded from the perceptions of force users.

He was looking at the vast, open plains that surrounded the bunker. He watched as the long grass gently swayed in the soft wind that blew across the plains; it reminded him of the holopaintings he had seen of Naboo, Dantooine, and Alderaan.

The serenity of the quietly picturesque landscape was broken by the chirping from his comlink earpiece.

"Base command to all units; be advised, satellite com scans show hostile units are approaching from the east and have just crossed the ten-kilometer perimeter boundary."

*Very clever, coming from the east will put the sun in our eyes. And ten kilometers out, Xendar thought to himself. And depending on their mode of transport, their arrival time could be anywhere from thirty seconds to sometime this afternoon.*

Several minutes of silence passed as Xendar squinted his eyes against the morning sun as he scanned the horizon for any kind of movement to the east of his current position.

"Base command to all units; be advised, hostile units have just crossed the five-kilometer perimeter boundary. Wait," The com went silent again.

"Confirmed! Hostile unit transports have offloaded their units at the five-kilometer perimeter boundary and are pulling back. Base Command to eastern sector units; detecting a large force moving fast in your direction."

Several moments of silence passed, and while Xendar could not see the Ewok horde, as he was in the southeastern quadrant, as the distance and the tall grass hid them from view. He could sense a grim determination and anger that the horde was feeling as it raced forward.

Another voice broke the silence over the comline.

"Lord Thrain, the hostile forces have crossed the three-kilometer perimeter boundary; the emperor orders you to begin your attack."

"Understood, Howlranger wing, this is Black Ace One. Talon and Beast Squadrons, you are on CAP over the ten-kilometer perimeter boundary.

Ripper and Claw Squadrons, eliminate the transports, do not let them escape! Colonel Rathelin, you, Fang, and Hunter Squadrons; form up on me. We are going in! Remember, aim for the center of that hostile mass! That's what those Flame Carpet Warheads are for. Remember, if anything gets inside the one-kilometer perimeter boundary, break off. We have people down there."

"Understood, Black Ace One," was the response from all pilots.

"Base command to inferno troopers," The voice of The Emperor broke in over the comline. "If any of those furballs get past the one-kilometer perimeter boundary, immolate them!"

"Understood, my lord," a harsh voice responded.

From overhead, Xendar could hear the drone of the TIE Defender engines; and as they got closer, the drone of the engines changed to a higher pitch, announcing that the TIE Defenders were beginning their attack run. And as the sounds of the explosions echoed across the plains, the blazing flames rose higher into the skies.

In the tides of war, even when you strike an enemy with a decisive blow, and victory is all but assured in your favor, the enemy still can play a devastating hand, as the clan of Scholae Palatinae would soon find out.

The alarm claxon system clamored loudly over the comline, sending the massive crescendo into Xendar's ear, causing him to nearly rip the comlink out of his ear.

"Enemy troops have entered the base; enemy troops have entered the base." An automated response system repeated.

"Spar Team One and all force users on the tree line perimeter boundary, fall back to the bunker and assist with repelling hostile forces. Repeat, Spar Team One and all force users on the tree line perimeter boundary, fall back to the bunker to assist with repelling hostile forces." A voice over the comline ordered.

"Understood Base Command, I'm on my way," Xendar said as he turned and blazed a trail up the hill toward the bunker.

Upon entering the bunker, Xendar and the rest of the force users found themselves seemingly transported to another world; gone were the wide-open, vibrantly verdant fields and trees of greens, yellows, browns, and blues. In their place; were the narrow, dark, smoke-filled corridors lit with the dim blood-red lighting, which only added another layer to the already ominous feel that pervaded the atmosphere of the bunker. Xendar pulled his lightsaber off his belt, and then cloaked himself from sight and from being perceived through the force. He then took off down one of the corridors, as he made his way further into the bunker, a loud war-whoop came echoing down it as the corridor started to fill with angry Ewoks. Xendar dropped his cloak as he ignited his lightsaber.

The Ewoks momentarily stopped in their tracks; they were slightly taken aback by the sight of a faceless, black-cloaked, and armored apparition holding a blood red-black blade that stood looming before them. But that shock proved to be only momentarily as the Ewoks started hissing, whooping, and shouting.

Xendar threw his head back and let loose a wampa roar, The sound seemed to shake them up slightly before the entire horde rushed forward. Xendar waited until the last moment, then dropping to one knee, he lashed out with a wide arcing slash, catching the first three Ewoks across the midsections, neatly bisecting them. And before he had finished his slash, Xendar brought up his left hand and made a shoving gesture, and the rest of the horde was blown backwards.

Rushing forward, Xendar let loose a flurry of slashes on the now staggered horde, showing them no mercy. One brave Ewok let loose a war cry as it tried to jump on to stab and bludgeon Xendar with its ax and knife. Xendar responded in kind. Lashing out with a force amplified punch, catching the Ewok square in the face, which took the full brunt of the punch along with Xendar's claws. And with a sickening crack, the Ewok's small body slightly folded up, and then its lifeless corpse fell to the floor with a heavy thud.

As Xendar stood up, he found himself surrounded by silence, as Ewoks were either dead or had fled deeper into the bunker. And in that moment of stillness, Xendar took a deep breath, grateful for the moment of peace he had been given, which was then broken by the sound of rushing footsteps. As several of the newest force user members of the clan came rushing down the corridor.

"We heard something like a wampa yelling, so we thought that..." The new clan member started to say before getting a good look at the carnage before them.

"If you are just going to stand there like a bunch of brain-dead nerf herders, then get out of the way!" A voice ordered as a pair of red lightsabers and a green, dual-bladed lightsaber came into view.

"Lord Archangel and Lord Aldaric," one of the newer members of the clan said respectfully.

At that moment, everyone's comlink crackled to life. "All units, all units be advised, enemy forces have split up, one group assaulting the Docking Bay Three control room and the other group making their way toward the throne room." A voice over the comlink stated.

Archangel looked over at Aldaric, then at the rest of the group.

"I'm going to the Throne Room, and half of you are coming with me. The other half is going with Aldaric. So, move!" Archangel said, walking down the corridor.

"And where are you going?" Aldaric asked, looking over at Xendar.

"Docking Bay Three," Xendar said simply.

Aldaric simply nodded. "Good, let's go!"

When they arrived at Docking Bay Three, they found it a scene of massive chaos. Supply crates overturned, vehicles were on fire, and bodies from both sides were strewn everywhere.

"Get them!" One of the Clan Taldryan soldiers yelled. "Don't let them get near the control room!"

A loud war-whoop reverberated off the walls as Ewoks seemed to come from everywhere.

"Xendar, get down!" A familiar voice shouted.

"Everyone, drop!" Another voice yelled.

Xendar dropped to the ground as a Flash grenade went sailing overhead into the center of a large horde of Ewoks and Taldryan soldiers.

Where it exploded with a loud bang and a bright flash of light.

"SPAR Team! Let them have it!" Oriyanna shouted as she brought her DC-17m up to her shoulder and let loose a volley of blaster fire.

"SPAR Team! Take cover and return fire." Oriyanna said as she ran to where Xendar was.

"Are you okay?" She asked Xendar as he got up.

"I'm fine, but duck!" He yelled.

Oriyanna dropped to a crouch and spun around, bringing her DC-17 up to bear only to find that Xendar had already reacted, throwing his lightsaber at a set of onrushing Ewoks, as the blade spun, it neatly bisected the Ewoks, cutting the both of them in to two.

"Here! catch!" Oriyanna yelled as she tossed another soldier her DC-17 blaster. She then reached down and pulled out her DC-15 pistols, spinning around, she stood back-to-back with Xendar. And as the fight progressed in time, the two of them flowed through the battle as if they were of one mind. As one would surge forward, the other would cover them so that no one could surprise them. As one rather brave but foolish Ewok found out.

It used an overturned vehicle as cover. After a few seconds, the Ewok began clambering up the side of the vehicle. Upon reaching the top, the Ewok let loose a war scream and launched itself at Oriyanna's back. The extra weight caused Oriyanna to stagger for a few steps.

"Get off me, you furry little creep!" Oriyanna yelled as she repeatedly slammed her back against the side of the overturned vehicle. Which proved to be very successful, as the Ewok let loose of Oriyanna and momentarily slumped against the side of the vehicle. As it regained its senses, it noticed a dark shadow looming in front of it. Looking up, it gave Xendar a baleful look and rushed at him in an attempt to bite his legs.

Xendar gave the Ewok a flat look and slammed his hand down hard on top of the Ewok's head. Clamping his fingers around its skull, Xendar sent a short torrent of Force Lighting into the enraged Ewok, thoroughly stunning it. Xendar extended his right leg as



far back as it would go, he then booted the Ewok with a force amplified kick. Xendar watched with morbid satisfaction as the Ewok went flying between two poles and slammed into a vehicle safety net. The Ewok gave off a loud whimper and flopped on the ground after untangling itself from the net.

The battle in the docking bay stretched into hours. As those Taldryan clan members who found themselves pinned down with no means of getting reinforcements or escape, came to the realization that surrender was their only option. And with great reluctance, they put down their weapons and raised their hands over their heads.

As he watched the prisoners get moved to a more secure location, Aldaric tapped his earpiece comlink.

"Aldaric to Archangel, do you read me?"

"I read you. The emperor is safe, and we have pushed back the hostile forces back out of the bucker and our units are in pursuit."

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Watching the sunrise above the horizon, Xendar found himself sitting on the log that he had been sitting on the previous day.

"Mind if I join you?" Oriyanna asked as she sat beside him, wrapping her arms around his waist and laying her head on his shoulder.

Xendar responded by wrapping his arms around Oriyanna and pulling her closer.

The two of them sat in silence, enjoying the gentle serenity of the sunrise and the wind softly blowing through the trees.

"I figured I would find you two out here," a voice with a slow drawl stated.

"You do have to admit, it is a very picturesque spot," another voice broke in, a female one.

"There is plenty of room if you and dad want to join us mom," Oriyanna said, still curled up against Xendar.

"I think here is a good spot," Jasten said as he sat down on the ground with his back against the log.

"Actually, I came out here to offer everyone some caf," Deshavara said, as she moved around the log.

"Jasten, Oriyanna, and here is yours, Xendar, it's ice-cold with chocolate and Takhal nuts," Deshavara said, handing Xendar a container.

"Who drinks ice-cold caf this early in the morning?" Jasten asked, giving Xendar an odd look.

"Quiet you," Deshavara said as she sat down next to Jasten, "I've had to put up with some of your weird habits for a long time now."

" Yes, I do, and that is why you love me," Jasten said as he gave her a roguish smile.

Xendar looked over at Jasten and Deshavara, as they curled up around each other. *They are certainly are different. Xendar thought to himself. A human and a falleen happily married, and they managed to raise a daughter who thinks the galaxy of them. That's pretty amazing.*

The quiet of the forest was interrupted by the sound of a ship's engines as it started to leave the atmosphere.

"Huh, what's that?" Oriyanna asked in a sleepy-like voice.

"Prisoner Transport," Jasten stated.

"One ship?" Deshavara asked. "I thought that there would have been a few more ships, especially with those disabled transports in orbit,"

"Transports in orbit?" Oriyanna asked.

"This wasn't just a simple mob rush; this was a multi-pronged attack. The initial strike was a distraction to keep our attention while other forces came down and took us out. After the initial strike, a raider ship was to jump in and lure the *Palpatine* away so that the space transports that just jumped in; could make their way to the ground unharmed. It was at this point, that Lord Thran ordered everyone but Ripper and Talon squadrons into orbit to disable the transports, and those that made it to the surface; met a fierce onslaught from Lady Shadow and Rayne, with Rasilvenaira Stormraven single-handedly ambushing and taking down several groups on her own. Then there was Lord Reiden; he gathered a group of fighters to lead a boarding assault against the raider ship. And then there was Lord Archangel, he arrayed his forces to protect the emperor. He single-handedly took down most of the hostile forces that were trying to assault the throne room."

"I have a couple of questions," Xendar said. " The first one is, where did the initial assault force get their ground transports? And the second question is, why did they drop off the Ewoks five kilometers from the bunker instead of at the tree line?"

"From what I have heard, the Swift Assault 5's were dropped on planet at the same as the forces were breaking out the Ewoks. As for the second question, I believe that was the original plan, interestingly enough, the Taldryans had tapped into our comms network. So, when they picked up that they were being tracked, I guess the commander of the transports panicked and dropped the Ewoks off short, hoping that the long grasses would cover their movements."

"So, in the end, you could say for those of us from Scholae Palatinae, it's just another day and just another mission," Jasten added.