

Classified System.
Classified Planet.
40 ABY

It'll be a long time comin'.
But you got the message now.
'Cause I was never going.
Yeah, you're the one that's going down.
One of us is going down.
I'm not running. It's a little different now
'Cause one of us is going
One of us is going down
One of us is going down!
You're Going Down by Sick Puppies

Throughout history, there have been many grand tales told. Those tales have been passed down through the generations, ensuring their continuation. But sometimes, the stories that fall to the wayside and are almost forgotten by many. Have something that the grand tales do not. A look into the minds and lives of those who are not ordinary, but not extraordinary.

"We've got company," Xendar said as the sensor system alarm blared loudly throughout the ship.

Oriyanna looked out the side viewport as the ships came close.

"That's Howlrunner Wing," Oriyanna stated as several black, silver, and red TIE Defenders flew past. "What in the galaxy are they doing out here?"

"That," Xendar said, pointing out the main viewport.

"Is that the..." Oriyanna said, squinting her eyes. As the ship Xendar pointed toward came into focus, her eyes shot open wide. "The *Palpatine*! Something must have gone down bad for them to bring out the fleet flagship and Howlrunner Wing!" Oriyanna exclaimed.

Just then, the comms system crackled to life.

"This is the ISN *Palpatine* to the unidentified ship. You are in a restricted space. Identify yourself. If you do not comply, you will be fired upon."

Xendar hit the comms switch. "ISN *Palpatine*, this is Shadow Walker Veradun, sending verification codes now," Xendar replied as he transmitted the information. Several seconds ticked by as Xendar and Oriyanna waited in silence.

"Shadow Walker Veradun, verification codes authenticated." The voice from the comms system stated. "You are ordered to dock with the *Palpatine*. Upon docking, you are to disembark from your ship and proceed to the main docking bay, where you will receive new orders. *Palpatine* out."

"Well, that was helpful," Oriyanna said sarcastically. "First, they send us after that lost ship. Then, after we get to that ship's last location. They tell us to come here. And where exactly is here?"

"That, I couldn't tell you. Other than the galactic coordinates. The galaxy map shows nothing in this area," Xendar said as he piloted the ship toward one of the *Palpatine's* docking bays.

"Well, there is certainly something here. I mean, the *Palpatine* is in orbit over something," Oriyanna snidely remarked.

Xendar took his hands off the controls and took the engines offline as the *Palpatine's* tractor beam took hold and started to pull the ship into the docking bay.

"As the ship landed with a gentle bump, Xendar dropped the entry ramp. He then stood up and turned around to face Oriyanna.

"I understand. Things have been exceedingly chaotic the last while. And we have more responsibilities now. Before the Insidious tried to take over Scholae Palatinae. We didn't have Daesha. We really didn't know each other. I was a low-level Shadow Operative, and you were third in command in one of the clan's special operations teams." Xendar said, taking Oriyanna's hands in his. "But right now, you are going to have to play the part of Captian Oriyanna Rathelin, commanding officer of the newly formed 1st Scholae Palatinae Advanced Response Team. A well-composed and unflinchingly competent professional soldier."

"I know, it's just that some days, I would like it if you, me, and Daesha could spend more time together like we did at the Golden Beaches."

"That was a lot of fun," Xendar said, smiling. "But you do remember because of that trip. Daesha now has a young Corellian Sand Panther running around at my parent's home," he added as he pulled up the hood of his cloak and gently pulled Oriyanna toward the entry ramp.

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"You have been summoned here on a matter of great urgency," the holorecording of Lord Kamjin addressed the crowd from one of the TIE fighter gantry way catwalks.

"Where you are, and why you are here does not matter. That is irrelevant. What is relevant. Is your performance in executing the task given to you. Commander Raleien Sonavarret will be overseeing this operation. Commander Sonavarret, you may proceed."

After a few seconds, the holo figure winked out, and Commander Sonavarret stepped into view.

The burly Pantoran looked down at the crowd for a few moments before speaking.

"For this mission briefing, I will be as succinct as possible. I have neither the time nor the inclination to bandy about with idle words. Colonel Rathelin!"

"Sir!" A Falleen female with a full head of black hair bound up in a braid, snapped to attention and responded.

"You are to rejoin your wing and augment the *Palpatine's* fighters while they patrol the planet. And remember. If anything tries to enter or leave the planet without proper authorization. Eliminate them. For all of the ground units, you will be assigned operational sectors. You are to treat all unknowns in those sectors as hostiles. Subdue and capture, but do not kill! Reiden Karr, you and your team; sector seven. Aldaric and House Caliburnus, sectors; one, three, and six. Archangel Palpatine and House Acclivis Draco, sectors; two, four, and five. Commander Rathelin, you and the Night Wraiths; sector nine. Commander Quenstist, you, and the rest of the special operations unit teams, sectors; eight, ten, and eleven. Captain Rathelin, you and your SPAR team; sector twelve. Operational commanders, how you decide to deploy your forces within your sectors will be at your discretion. Just remember, failure will not be tolerated. Transports to the surface will be disembarking in five minutes. Dismissed!"

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As the transport made its way to the surface, Aldaric and everyone else found out how little they knew about their mission and this planet. While Aldaric thought it best to make three teams with himself, Thran, and Shadow as team leaders.

Looking down at the datapad that everyone received as they stepped aboard the transport. As it turned out, each operational sector was an entrance to a massive hedgerow maze.

And then there was the hedge itself. The perimeter was an alchemized plant infused with durasteel and sharp enough to slice a limb off of a person just by brushing against it. And then sandwiched at the center of the perimeter hedge itself, that is, if you managed to get that far, was a three-meter-tall electron wall system.

Someone is very serious about keeping someone in. Aldaric thought to himself. Looking up from the datapad, Aldaric glanced about the interior of the transport. *Rayne has a good rapport with Thran,* Aldaric thought to himself as he was deciding on who to be on which team. *So, I could put her on his team. Sanguis and Feanor, I don't think those two would allow anyone but Shadow to lead them. Dakari, and Emile,* Aldaric thought as he glanced at the two of them sitting in the center section of the transport. *Those two were almost like blank slates, so there would be no problem fitting them onto any team. Then there is Jasmine, I don't think that she would do too well with anyone but Thran, as she is his daughter.*

Thran, a father. That is something I didn't think that I would ever see. Aldaric thought to himself. *Though, come to think of it. Shadow is a caring mother of twin boys. And Xendar had adopted a young Twi'lek looking girl. I guess it goes to show that some of the most unlikely of people make fairly decent family-oriented people.*

Aldaric paused for a moment, then shaking his head to clear his mind, Aldaric tried to get it back on task.

"Okay, listen up, everyone. In less than five minutes, we will be hitting the dispersal point. So here is the game plan: Sector Team One will consist of myself, Emile Saber, Ulfark, Kah'ri Marru, Rasilvenaira StormRaven, and Lucyeth. Sector Team Three will consist of Thran Occasus, Jasmine Kast, Rayne, Sykes Jade, and Xendar Thendaris.

And Sector Team Six will consist of Shadow Nighthunter, Sanguis Caldiren, Fearor Lang, Flelm, and Dakari. Also, Sanguis, Rasilenaira, and Xendar, you three will be acting as maze runners. Which means you are to either capture the hostiles or lead them to one of the exits. Good luck and good hunting!"

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It was several hours after nightfall. Standing near the entrance to one of the maze's dead ends. Xendar used the force to cloak himself and hide himself from sight. After about ten minutes, he watched as a group of beings crept by. While there was a small number of Humans and Near-Humans, the group was mostly comprised of Ewoks.

"How big is this blasted thing?!" One of the humans quietly hissed.

"Expansive," a female voice answered back. "And with this entire area under a comms blackout, we are essentially blind! Our only hope of getting out of here lies with these Ewoks knowing this maze. But knowing Shadow Nighthunter, she probably laced this maze with some of the worst traps that she could think of!" The comms blackout was something that Xendar had noticed upon entry into the maze. Although the globe sat target tracking system seemed to be working just fine, the last time he looked, it had shown his location with no problems. The one thing he was surprised at, this group had made no mention of the force field that was in place just over the top of the three-meter hedge. He had found that one out the hard way when he tried to jump over the hedges near the entrance to Sector Three.

Several moments later, a female force user; gave a start. "Hey! what the!" She exclaimed as she noticed that her connection to the force seemed to be suppressed to almost nothing.

"Look out! Beside you!" Another shouted.

A shimmering flicker appeared on the female's left side, and as she turned toward it. It began to take form. A midnight-black cloaked figure appeared, lashing out with a vicious right hook, catching the female hard in the jaw, spinning her around, and dropping her to the ground with a heavy thud.

"Eat this! You Palatinae scum!" A voice yelled out as a chorus of blaster fire was let loose.

"Did we get it?" Someone yelled.

"What was that?" Another voice called out.

"I don't know, but we need to get out of here!" A second voice yelled back.

"Shoot it! It's one of those Palatinae Fear Freaks, and it's behind us!" The first person yelled.

The crowd whipped around and for a brief moment, paused. There it stood, with its back to the moon, a faceless, black-cloaked, and armored apparition with a lightsaber in its taloned fingers and with a second set of blood-red claws that seemed to glow in the dark. And with a familiar *snap-hiss*, the blood-red black blade sprang to life.

"Take it down! A voice yelled, seemingly breaking the spell. The Ewoks gave off a cry of defiance as they charged forward while the others of the group started firing.

The figure made a two-handed shoving gesture, the Ewoks went flying backwards as the figure's Force Push made contact with them.

"Shoot it!" Someone yelled.

With swift and precise movements, the figure reflected the blaster bolts away, then they threw back their head and let loose a loud roar.

A short distance away, another small group had heard the roar as well.

"What in the galaxy was that?!" One person hissed.

"That's a Wampa!" "A second said.

"A Wampa? What would anyone want to have anything to do with a Wampa?!" The first replied.

"I don't know, those Palatinae bishwags are a bunch of barvy weirdos! Case in point, here we are trying to rescue Ewoks from the former Empress. And the current emperor is weirder still! He seems to have a thing for Rancors! Rancors, mind you!" A third let loose.

"Hey! what the..." One figure started to say when a sphere of blackness settled over the top of them.

As the sphere had settled in place. A lithe figure jumped into the middle of the fray, and the sounds of a scuffle ensued. It was followed by the sound of silence, and as the sphere of blackness dissipated, a single figure stood standing.

"Then today will be a most fortuitous day for you. Because there is an excellent chance for you to meet the emperor," Rasilvenaira Stormraven quietly stated as she set about restraining and tagging the now captured prisoners.

Xendar was running down one of the hedgerows pathways when his comlink came to life, causing him to come to a complete stop.

"Sector Command One to Maze Runner three, come in Maze Runner Three," Aldaric's voice came in over the comm.

"This is Maze Runner Three to Sector Command One. I read you five by five. Though, isn't there some kind of comms blackout?" Xendar quietly asked, intentionally keeping his voice low.

"There was. But the Emperor has temporarily disabled it. He also wants to reward you with an assignment. You are to relocate to Sector twelve immediately

"What about the other hostiles?" Xendar asked, keeping his tone neutral. Usually, when one is rewarded with another assignment. It was not always beneficial to the operative tasked with completing it.

"The emperor is bringing some standard troops to aid in the search. As it stands. You and the other Maze Runners have restrained a fair amount of Clan Taldryan's Ewok Rescue Force," Aldaric replied.

"We are capturing members of Clan Taldryan?" Xendar asked incredulously. "Wait, if this is Lady Nighthunter's Ewok farm, then why didn't she tell us about the planet herself?"

"Yes, they are, and yes, it is. That is why we were issued a capture, and not kill order."

Aldaric stated. "But as for Lady Nighthunter, I believe that the Emperor himself asked her not to. Apparently, there was a deep-cover mole feeding Clan Taldryan information on our clan for quite some time. And the Emperor wanted that mole rooted out. And now that the mole has been captured, we have been given a fair amount of information."

"I understand. That does explain as to why things happened the way that they did. What is my assignment?" Xendar asked, thinking it best to just get it over with.

"A transport ship crash-landed near sector twelve, one of ours. And if the reports from the ship's crew are true, Teebu Nyrrire was aboard and has since fled into the Hedgerows, and the emperor wants him found.

"Understood, I will make my way to Sector twelve immediately. And when I get back into better comms range, I will send my thanks to the emperor for this reward." Xendar said with a smile as the thought about punting Teebu Nyrrire's furry little frame back to Ragnath, was quite an appealing one.