

Escaping the hunt

Augur Xantros

11518

36 ABY, High orbit over Ragnath, Caperion system

Xantros looked at the consol of his Gozanti-class Imperial Freighter. He entered the code that he had received couple of minutes ago through a heavily encrypted channel of the Advanced Inquisitorius Network to the navcomp. The message that he received with it stated that it would allow him to track an operative of the Shadow Academy Society that had been captured by the forces of the Collective. That operative was indicated to possess important intel about a base of operations of the Collective. It was necessary to follow the tracking device placed on the operative by another agent of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood and to rescue him from the hands of infamous Shikari Huntresses, while avoiding fighting the Huntresses themselves, if only possible, as they were extremely dangerous.

„Of course, an unprepared field operative screws up a mission and elite agents are forced to rescue them, before an enemy kills or interrogates them,” sighed Xantros displeased. „I might deal with more important matters right now, but it is, of course, a top priority mission.”

The Duros might have disliked the idea of abandoning his duties in House Excidium, even for a brief period of time, he was still going to accept the mission. The data obtained by the operative of the Brotherhood was probably going to have a crucial meaning for the further phases of the war against the Collective. It was necessary to rescue the operative and help him report back to his superiors. There was more behind the mission than just retrieving a captured agent than obtaining the vital intel data. Winning a battle against the Collective would severely weaken its presence in the Caperion system, helping Clan Scholae Palatinae to gain an upper over their enemies and to conquer the system to rebuild the Empire there. Even more importantly from the Augur's perspective was the fact that saving the operative, even if he was not a Force-sensitive person, might help recruit him for the Unity. Having a loyal ally among the staff of the Shadow Academy would definitely be helpful in spreading the philosophy of the Unity among the recruits and indoctrinating them to follow its teachings.

Xantros raised his eyebrows. The tracking device was located somewhere in the Kessel Sector, C, between Eadu and the boundary between the Outer Rim and the Wild space. Fortunately, it was not that far from Caperion system. He could actually get there within few hours, rescue the operative and transport him to a safe place. He would be back in two days at maximum, letting him return to his duties in House Excidium.

The Augur entered the coordinations of the tracking devices to the navcomp and instructed it to jump into the hyperspace as soon as the ship was in a safe distance from the planet.

„Guys, we are setting off,” spoke the Duros through intercom to the other three members of the crew that agreed to go on that mission with him. They were regular pilots of the Imperial Navy, but he did not familiarize them with the true nature of the mission. All they knew were that they were to rescue an operative of Imperial Scholae Intelligence. The less they knew, the easier the mission would be to complete.

Few hours later, a space station on the edge of the Maw

The unnamed space station located near the edge of the Maw was a surprisingly busy as for a relatively small place that was away from any big hyperspace lanes. It could mean only one thing – illegal dealings like narcotics trafficking, trading slaves, cage fights and other criminal activities. A large number of Imperial-style starships allowed the extracton team to land in a hangar bay with ease as they did not stand out from the ships. It seemed like if most the activities on the station were commenced by people coming from previously Imperial occupied space.

As discussed it earlier with the crew, Xantros left the ship alone. He was the only person that knew what the operative looked like, as he did not want to share any details about the man under the pretence of state interest of the Empire. He also wanted the ship to be ready to take off as soon as he would return onboard with his target. There would be no time to waste, because it was highly probable that they would be chased by the operatives of the Collective.

The Augur hid his lightsaber in an inner pocket of his uniform, so that it was not easily noticeable. He hoped not to use it during his mission, preferring to use his BlasTech DH-17 blaster pistol in that case. The lightsaber would bring too much attention and that was something Xantros wished to avoid at all costs, if it was only possible. Thus, he attached his blaster pistol to his belt in a way that everybody could see it. Hopefully, it would be enough to discourage any criminal from disturbing him.

The Duros moved slowly through the crowded station, carefully looking around, so that he would not miss his target. The man was probably heavily guarded, but Xantros had to find him first, if he wished to save him. Almost an hour later, the Augur noticed the operative of the Shadow Academy Society sitting at a table next to a large cage, where a fight between two human slaves commenced. However, the man, who was handcuffed, paid more attention to his female guard. One might call her attractive, but it was her blaster rifle that really attracted the eyes of the prisoner. She had probably threatened to kill him, if he made a move, when not ordered to, and few bruises on his face made it clear that they had beaten him to convince him that the threats were real. Fortunately, the Huntress was not Kendra Icasta.

Still, as an elite genetically-enhanced operative, she was going to be a serious threat. It would not be wise to attack her, as she was dangerous herself and there were probably more of them around. There was just one solution that might provide Xantros enough time to intercept the operative and to take him back. Mind domination. Even though he was aware that it was not going to last for a long time, as the elite operatives like the Huntresses had strong minds, he had to give it a try. Even using the Force to hide his presence would be extremely risky, as he would need to decloack in the moment of attacking his target. It would eliminate just one of the Huntresses, while more would remain alive. At least one of them could be somewhere near and kill him before he would be even able to realize what was happening. He had to get rid of the guard or to make her let the prisoner go by dominating her mind.

Standing around ten meters away from the Huntress, the Duros focused and waved his hand. He instructed the guard to let the prisoner go to a toilet that was nearby. It was simple and thus more effective than more elaborate commands. Soon, he saw that after a short discussion, she removed the hand-cuffs from the man and let him go. The Augur did not wait for a long time and followed his target. Before the man could enter the toiet, Xantros touched his arm and said, „You will go with me.”

The operative looked back with fear in his eyes and asked, „Who are you? What do you want from me?”

„I am operative Z5F-221B of the Inquisitorius,” answered Xantros. „I am here to help you escape

the Collective. We need to go. Hurry up, there is no time to waste!”

„But...” started the man, but the Duros grabbed his arm and forced the agent to go with him.

„It is a matter of minutes before they will start looking for you,” interrupted him the Augur. „We need to reach my ship before they manage to find us. I will explain everything later. Now, come quickly!”

The duo moved quickly through the crowd, hoping that it will cover them from the eyes of the operatives of the Collective. However, few minutes later Xantros noticed one of the Huntresses behind them. She still did not notice them yet, but it was going to happen soon. Fortunately, it was also going to take less time to reach the hangar bay. Suddenly, a blaster shot came through the air less than a meter away from them.

The Duros looked back and saw the Huntress that he had noticed before. People in the crowd started screaming and running around what gave him enough time to detach the blaster pistol from the belt and aim at his target, before she could shoot again.

„Hide behind me,” said Xantros to his companion, so that she would not be able to kill him at once. „I will take care of her.”

It took him just few more seconds to take a precise aim and shoot at his target. Immediately, urged by the Force, he dropped on the ground and pulled the operative of the Shadow Academy Society with him, avoiding what was a deadly and perfectly aimed blaster shot from the rifle of the Huntress. He immediately stood up and pushed his companion with him. Though the brief firefight took less than a minute, it was still too much time. They had to rush before more of the Collective operatives would get close enough to shoot at them.

Surprisingly, there were no more troubles on their way back to the hangar bay. Xantros did not think that it would be so easy as he did not expect professionals like the Huntresses to give up so quickly, without making any real effort to catch the prisoner. Even though it was possible that they preferred not to waste any more members of their team, he had bad feelings about it. And his bad feelings turned out to be true.

Three Huntresses, including their leader herself, were standing nearby his Imperial Gozanti-Class Freighter, blocking the way to its entrance.

„Hand the prisoner back and we will mercifully kill you now,” ordered Kendra Icasta. „Otherwise, we will make sure that the Collective takes care of you and provides you as comfortable conditions in your prison cell as it is only possible, while you await for the interrogation and punishment for your crime.”

„I do not think that you are in a position to make demands,” replied Xantros coldly, who activated his personal communicator and opened a channel with his ship during Kendra's speech.

„Why do you think so?” asked Icasta.

„Because you are standing between me and my ship,” explained the Duros.

„Yes, we block your way to it. You will not escape,” replied the Chiss.

„But you are also in front of ship's guns,” said the Augur. „I do not need to do anything more to

have you killed.”

„Your comrades, if you have any, are probably unaware of the situation,” spoke Icasta with a nasty grin.

„My comrades have been listening to our friendly conversation,” replied Xantros with an even more nasty grin on his noseless face. „I believe that they are almost ready to shoot you with the ship's guns. Are you ready to test their precision?”

Immediately, the blaster turrets at the top and the bottom of the freighter turned at the Huntresses, who started running away to find a cover. The Duros used the opportunity and pushed his companion towards the ship. He himself stayed behind to keep the Huntresses unable to aim at them by shooting from his blaster pistol at them and slowly moving back to the ship's entrance. Few minutes later, the freighter safely jumped into the hyperspace.

Then, Xantros relaxed and said to one of the crew members, who was also a technician, „Check him. I do not want any surprises, when we deliver him.”

The technician scanned the operative and spoke, „There is no sign of any tracking device. I think we are safe.”

„Good, proceed with our journey as planned. I will let you off the ship on Ragnath and go for another mission,” said the Duros.

„What about him?” asked the technician.

„This is the mission I need to take up. I need to deliver him to a specifically designated destination, where he will be the most useful,” explained Xantros. „However, I do not need your assistance any longer. You will be able to return to your duties.”