INTO THE PIT

With the approach of the First Order fleet towards the Gasriese system, there was clearly a need for intel on the foe of the Emperor's Hammer. Major Mack Udar the Commander of Spear Squadron, Admiral Alexandre Morgan the Commander of Battlegroup II, and General Honsou of Sin Squadron met aboard the ISDII Relentless to discuss the matters at hand.

"Well gentleman, even though this is a TIE Corps operation, I believe it is best if the Secret Order takes the helm on this. If there are no objections, Admiral Morgan?" said Honsou.

"None from me Grand Master" Admiral Alexandre replied, "how would you like to proceed with this?"

General Honsou took a deep breath and sighed. "We are going to need to get eyes and ears in there somehow and find a weakness to exploit. We simply do not have the firepower to deal with their capital ships head on. However, unfortunately, neither myself nor you can do that, we're too high priority and wouldn't be able to sneak past much of anything." Honsou turns to Mack, "This is where you step in Major."

Mack stiffens up and salutes General Honsou. "Yes, Grand Master, what is it that you require of me?" asks Mack.

Honsou clears his throat and has a serious look in his eyes. "We need you to infiltrate the First Order. Find out as much as you can about their forces. Schematics of their fighters, capital ships, anything that can give us an edge." Says Honsou.

"Will I be going in alone, my Master, or may I assemble a team to infiltrate the enemy?" Asks Mack.

Honsou rubs his chin for a moment, contemplating the question. "Hmmm, I think it would be best to gather a very small team, as to not raise suspicion. I have already felt a tremor in the Living Force, and it does not bode well." Honsou replies.

"Yes, I have felt it too", says Admiral Alexandre Morgan, "there's something out there, masking itself from the Force. Almost like a void."

"Your insight serves you well Warden" says Honsou, "We must proceed with haste and caution. Chosen Mack, assemble a team of 3, including yourself, to infiltrate the First Order as your primary objective. Your secondary objective will be to investigate this disturbance and quite possibly be a rescue mission."

"A rescue mission?" Mack asks with a confused look on his face.

“Yes, as you are aware, your Lieutenant Commander Kryze has been on leave. However, that is not entirely true. I sent him on a mission to investigate this disturbance and he has yet to report back.” Says Honsou, “Grand Admiral Rapier and Sector Admiral Lap'lamiz have received reports that the Emperor is alive. Since Kryze has gone dark, you will need to see what is happening and if possible, bring Kryze back.”

“The Emperor -” Mack stumbles over his words upon hearing the news and quickly composes himself, “yes Grand Master, I will see to this expeditiously!” Mack salutes Admiral Morgan and General Honsou and hurries out of the room.

Mack heads down to his office and activates his holo terminal. The image of Argentine fizzles into shape. “Yes Quaestor, what do you need? I'm in the middle of training” says Argentine Argenthal, sounds of blaster fire in the background.

“Practicing with live rounds again? You know you're of no use to me dead. I'm transmitting coordinates, meet me there.” Says Mack.

“Yes Quaestor” replies Argentine and the holo terminal shuts down.

Mack taps a button on his desk, activating a comm link channel. “Nebula, ready the *Demon*, we're going on a mission” Mack commanded. The astromech droid replied with a series of beeps. “I'll fill you in on the ship, be ready to go in 5.” Mack replied.

The Beast

Several First Order Resurgent Star Destroyers exited hyperspace above a series of stations built into asteroids. Another ship, about the size of a dreadnaught arrives behind the fleet.

“We will be stationing here and preparing for our assault of the Emperor’s Hammer forces in the Gasriese system” says an ominous cloaked figure, with a deep and velvety voice on the holo table to two First Order officers. Only able to see the figure's glowing eyes, the figure continues, “There shall be no survivors, no quarter given to those that use the Emperor’s name in vain.” The two officers bow before the holo and in unison say “Yes my Lord”.

The holo table turns off and the hologram of the cloaked figure dissipates. “Send the troops down to gather supplies.” says the first officer to the second officer, who salutes and turns on heel, leaving the bridge.

Several transports leave the RSDs and head down to the asteroid stations. A lone shuttle leaves the dreadnaught following behind the main group of transports to the main station. As the transports touch down and their doors open, First Order stormtroopers, officers and personnel

flood out. Blaster rifles and pistols were drawn and aimed at the personnel of the station. “CONGRATULATIONS! YOU ARE ALL UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE FIRST ORDER!” yells out the commanding officer. “As a token of your gratitude for our gracious benevolence, you will be surrendering ALL supplies and munitions to the First Order! Anyone who opposes this, will be charged with treason and the punishment is death.” The commanding officer continued, with a wry smile across his face. None of the personnel or residents of the asteroid station made a sound, their faces locked in horror and disbelief of what was happening before their eyes.

The shuttle from the dreadnaught touches down at the landing pad and a cloaked figure disembarks. The figure was tall, and its cloak was black except for a red insignia on its back. It was wearing light armor, most likely for dexterity, and a black studded belt with two lightsabers attached. No one could see the face of the figure, not because of a mask, but as though there was a shroud of black smoke swirling where there should be a face. It walked over and stood next to the commanding officer, who bowed before it. “My Lord, I'm glad you have arrived. We were just discussing the fealty of the people here to the Emperor.” Says the commanding officer.

The figure turned its head to the officer and made what sounded like a series of creaking wooden chair noises. The officer nodded and turned back to the crowd, “Our Lord welcomes you into the fold of the First Order and can sense that there are some among you that are sensitive to the Force.” The figure makes another series of creaking noises. “He says that you are to come forth and meet him at his shuttle to test your abilities. Those deemed worthy will be given an opportunity to prove themselves to the Sith Eternal.” A shorter series of creaking noises comes out. “Those that are unworthy, will be culled.”

The crowd of people gasp and panic begins to set in. The figure ignites one of its lightsabers, the blade was a deep red color and it crackled with what looked like lightning that singed the ground near it like miniature lightning strikes. The cloaked figure let out a shrieking noise that silenced the crowd. Stormtroopers lined abreast of the officer and the cloaked figure. The crowd of people began to scatter and scream for their lives, to get away from the horror that had arrived before them. Stormtroopers began opening fire on the crowd and the figure leaped into the mix of the crowd, striking down 4 people with a single flourish. As the massacre carried on, the commanding officer turned to the First Order personnel and said “Begin sweeping the area for any and all equipment we may be able to use.” The personnel saluted him and began their task.

Meanwhile at one of the other asteroid stations, Mack sat at a work bench, tinkering with some equipment. His clothing is plain and dirty from working up a good day's worth of sweat. Nebula let out a series of beeps and alarms just as Argentine rushed into the makeshift engineering shop, “THEY'RE HERE! THE FIRST ORDER HAVE ARRIVED!” she shouted. Mack presses a finger to his lips. “Good, they're right on schedule.” he replies.

Two stormtroopers and an engineer enter the workshop. The troopers raise their rifles, trained on both Mack and Argentine. “Freeze!” commanded one of the troopers. “Everything here now belongs to the First Order!” shouts the other trooper.

“Whoa whoa whoa! Let's not be so hasty to violence boys” Mack says in a very cool and calm voice. “I'm just a simple engineer trying to live a simple life.”

“Hands up, both of you!” the first trooper commanded.

“Okay, okay, we get it.” says Mack, still maintaining his composure.

“Hey, um… do we really need to, uh, erm, do this, guys?” squeaked out the First Order engineer. He was of a smaller stature, blonde hair, and grey eyes behind a pair of goggles he was wearing.

‘*There's our mark’ Mack thought to himself. Argentine could sense what Mack was thinking without even seeing his face.*

“These are our orders, sir! Requisition any equipment and eliminate anyone that tries to stop us.” says the first stormtrooper.

“Yeah, I, uh know that. But do we really have to be so hostile about it? These look like really, um… uh..nice people” said the engineer, catching a glance of Argentine.

‘Out of your league kid’ Argentine thinks to herself, ‘I swear I'll gut you in front of everyone if you try me’.

As though the young engineer could feel the razor sharp daggers coming from Argentine's eyes, he quickly diverted his gaze and started fumbling over his words, “Hey! Is that an astromech you got there?! An R6 series with advanced galactic star chart mapping and a Fortex86x7 Processor?!” He exclaimed.

Mack lets out a whistle, “You sure do know your droids, huh kid?”

“And are these Omega antigrav C-09 boots?!” handling the pair of boots, fully inspecting them with awe.

“If you like them, you can have them” says Mack, “I have something really special in the back if you're interested.”

“Whoa?! Really?!” the engineer said excitedly and started to move away from the stormtroopers towards Mack, like a lost cub that just found its mama.

The second stormtrooper reached out to grab the engineer, “No sir! Wai-” the stormtrooper began to say before Argentine had yanked the engineer aside as he fell and hit the ground and she caught the trooper squarely on the chin with an uppercut. Before the first trooper could react to Argentine's lightning fast reflexes, she did a spinning heel kick to that trooper's head with such force that he spun himself into some equipment by the entryway and toppled over it. As the second trooper regained his balance and was bringing his rifle to bear, he let out a high pitched squeal of pain as Argentine had followed through on her spinning heel kick, with another spinning kick directly into the groin of the trooper. With both of her hands planted on the ground and using her momentum, spun her other leg up and kicked that trooper in the chest.

All the while that this is happening, the engineer is curled up on the floor in the fetal position and shaking from fear. *‘Who are these people?! There wasn't supposed to be any combatants here! Why am I here?! I just want to be in my shop, fixing things. And not whatever the hell this is!’ He thought to himself.*

Mack watched from behind the work bench, arms folded and chuckling to himself as Argentine let out all of her rage and raw power upon these two poor stormtroopers. Once the two troopers were no longer moving, Argentine turned and glared at the engineer who yelped in terror and curled up even tighter on the floor. “Enough!” commanded Mack to Argentine, who promptly eased out of an attack stance. Mack walked around the work bench to where the engineer was curled up on the floor and tapped him on the head. The engineer, shaking uncontrollably from fear, peeked up at Mack and saw him smiling, but had no idea why. “Are you hurt?” Mack asked. “N-n-n-no” the engineer stuttered. “Good, then get up.” Mack demanded.

“W-w-wh-what do you want from me?” the engineer stuttered, still shaking uncontrollably.

“Well first, you need to stop all of that shaking like you're out on Hoth with nothing on but your goggles! Secondly, we want on that Resurgent Class Star Destroyer up in the sky.” says Mack pointing upwards.

“I-I can't do that! They'll execute me on the spot! Throw me out of an airlock! Lock me inside of the cooling system!” the engineer exclaimed.

“They're gonna kill you? Boy! Did you not see what that lovely lady right there just did to your stormtroopers?! What do you think will happen to you if you make her mad? I for one don't want that to happen to you.” Mack explains and points at one of the troopers, “that poor fella isn't going to be expanding his bloodline and he was wearing ARMOR!”

The engineer looks at the trooper, his helmet had dents in it, the visor shattered and a massive dent in the cod piece. He shutters and looks at Argentine, who only rolls her eyes at him, then back to Mack. He takes a deep breath and tells Mack “Ok, I'll do it. But please don't let her hurt me.”

Mack smiles and slaps the engineer on the shoulder. “Good! I *knew* you'd see it my way! So, what's your name kid?” says Mack.

“1st Lieutenant Arrick Arroles, sir” Arrick replied. “And who are you people?”

“I'm Jaxxon Jerrs and this is Mabb Marro. And that's all you need to know” Mack says. Nebula lets out a series of beeps and bumps into Mack's leg. He turns around and sees Nebula, “And this little lady is… Siren, the R6 astromech”. Nebula makes a disapproving chirp of the name ‘Siren’.

“I don’t think she much cares for that name, Jaxxon, sir” says Arrick.

“Eh, she’ll be alright” says Mack, “First things first, go grab those boots.”

“Um… Really sir?” replies Arrick.

“Yeah, I told you, you could have them, didn’t I? One thing about me you need to understand, kid, I’m a man of my word.” says Mack, “Secondly”, as Mack affixes a fake restraining bolt to Nebula, “we need to make this as real as possible. I’m sure when we get back to your transports, they’re going to question us coming aboard. You **need** to sell it.”

“Oh- um, ok, I will try my best sir” Arrick said nervously.

“You’ll do fine kid and drop the sir stuff, you’re the one ‘*in charge*’ here.” says Mack, “I’ll tell you what, when they ask about the troopers, just tell them they’re grabbing more equipment for you but you want to get us in for processing as we will be ‘*necessary’* for a project you are working on.” Arrick gives a sigh of relief for not having to make up some sort of excuse. “And to sweeten the deal, once we are done, you’re coming with us. Because, face it, you’re a *traitor* now.” Arrick’s eyes widen as he understands what has transpired and Mack just laughs it off seeing the expression on Arrick’s face.

“Alright, let’s hide these two and head out. Everything is on you kid.” says Mack to Arrick.

The three and Nebula head to the landing pads where the transports are, Mack and Argentine are carrying some mechanical equipment with Nebula in tow. The First Order trooper on guard by the transports stopped them requesting clearance and explanation, to which Arrick obliged, “Y-yes, these two and the astromech are with me. We made quite the, um, find today!”

“Hold it!” the trooper exclaimed, “does that droid have a restraining bolt on it?”

“Yes, i-it does.” Arrick replied nervously, staring at Mack.

The trooper scans the restraining bolt Mack attached to Nebula. “All clear, go ahead” said the trooper, waving the group on. They board the transport and the pilot takes off.

An uneasying feeling enters Mack's mind as they approach the Resurgent Star Destroyer fleet. The *void* that Admiral Morgan was talking about was aboard the dreadnaught towards the rear of the fleet.

'That's gotta be where the Sith Eternal are and possibly Kryze' Mack thought to himself.

The transport touched down in the hangar and the group disembarked. They were met with a pair of stormtroopers who escorted them from the hangar. "Pssst-where are we going?" asked Mack. "We're going to processing, to get you guys registered, you might have to stay the night in the brig though." replied Arrick.

"You better not forget about us," Mack whispered. They went through processing and were taken down to the brig. The cell was spacious to Mack and Argentine's surprise. The two escorting stormtroopers walked away after the force field powered up to the cell. "Siren is coming with me for now." said Arrick, "but I will be back during shift change in a couple hours to get you two out. I promise."

"You had better" Argentine snapped at Arrick, who flinched despite being behind the force field.

"Y-yes ma'am!" said Arrick nervously, "C'mon Siren, let me show you my shop!". Nebula hesitated, but followed Arrick, knowing that even though the restraining bolt was a fake, she still needed to play her part of being a slave to it.

"Defenses seem light, don't you think?" asked Mack.

"Yes Quaestor, and I counted 47 stormtroopers and 17 data ports from the hangar to here which Nebula could connect to." Argentine replied.

"I wonder where everyone is at, aside from the asteroid stations?" Mack questioned. "Oh well, time to make our move."

Mack opened his mechanized arm and began pulling pieces out. Argentine looked puzzled. "What are you doing sir?" Argentine asked. "Wait." replied Mack as he assembled a crude looking comm link. "Nebula come in, begin Operation Zero One Zero."

Nebula chirped an affirmative response. After a few moments, the force field to their cell went down. The pair cautiously exited the cell and found their gear that was inconspicuously hidden amongst the items brought from the make shift shop. They also came across a crew locker room and disguised themselves as First Order personnel. The guard at the entrance to the brig was unaware of the duo's approach and Mack used Force Thrust, throwing the guard into the adjacent wall with such force he was knocked unconscious. Mack activated his comm link again, "Nebula, give us a way out of here" he said into the comm link. There were a series of chirps and beeps, and Arrick's voice on the other side "Hey wait! What are you doing?".

“Arrick, let her work, we are getting out of here.” Mack said into the comm link. Nebula transmitted a path to Mack for them to reach the hangar where a shuttle was. The Mack and Argentine made their way quickly to the hangar and ran into Arrick and Nebula. “This is crazy! There are alarms going off in different areas of the ship, but nothing in our path to here!” exclaimed Arrick.

“Well, you can thank Siren for that. She’s a droid of many talents. Were you able to get everything we came for?” said Mack. Nebula gave a beep of approval. “Good, let’s go then.” The group headed down into the hangar where the shuttle was and also two transports. As they began to approach the shuttle, the embark ramp opened on its own and a cloaked figure stepped out. Mack stopped everyone and turned to Argentine, “This is my fight, you get Nebula and Arrick back to the Emperor’s Hammer fleet.”

“I’m not leaving you alone to fight that thing Quaestor!” Argentine protested, she could sense the Dark Side flowing from the figure and even its aura frightened her.

“That’s not a request Argentine, now go!” Mack commanded, but giving her a wink to let her know that he knew what he was doing.

“Yes Quaestor, and you better not die or I’ll kill you myself” she replied, “Let’s go twerp, we’re taking that transport over there.” Argentine, Arrick and Nebula ran quickly to the transport craft.

The cloaked figure made chittering noises and turned to intercept them and Mack bellowed, “HEY! Your fight is with me!”. The figure turned its attention back to Mack and ignited its lightsaber, crackling with electricity. “Interesting, I’d wager you're using a corrupt power crystal for a lightsaber to do that. Unfortunately, I don’t have one” said Mack. The figure turned its head down towards its cloak and revealed its second lightsaber. It held the lightsaber in its offhand and made soft chittering sounds. It threw the second lightsaber at Mack who caught it and ignited the lightsaber. It hummed to life, with a gold colored blade. “Aww, for me? You shouldn’t have. And here I am with nothing to give you” Mack teased, “except for maybe the beating of your life!”

The figure shrieked and the two clashed their lightsabers! In brilliant flashes of light, the two dueled, neither giving the other any ground, nor allowing any openings for a clean hit on the other.

Argentine powered up the transport, “Nebula, get us out of here! Plot a course for the Gasriese system where the Emperor’s Hammer is!” she shouted. The transport lifted off and bolted out of the hangar, quickly entering hyperspace.

“It’s about time to wrap this up” says Mack as he changes his stance to a Juyo Form and called upon the Force to increase his speed so much that the figure could not track Mack’s

movements and the chaotic flow of his Juyo Form. It struggled to defend against the barrage of lightsaber slashes Mack dealt out. All the while, Mack was channeling his Dark Rage causing him to attack ever more ferociously. The cloaked figure attempted to counter one of Mack's lightsaber attacks only to miss and was a fatal mistake. With a single motion, Mack struck down his opponent, cutting off its right arm at the elbow, through its torso and upward, taking off its left arm at the shoulder.

As the cloaked figure fell in defeat, the shroud of where a face should be disappeared. Revealing a man, his eyes sewn shut and skin pale and scarred. With his last dying breath, he said “For…the Sith…Eternal” and his body disintegrated into dust.

Mack took the man's other lightsaber as his own trophy and proceeded to the shuttle. With the schematics of the First Order's capital ships and fighters safely with Nebula and Argentine, he could continue with the next part of his mission. Learning more of this *Sith Eternal,* and rescuing LCM Et'sen Kryze.

Despair

As the shuttle entered the hangar of the dreadnought, Mack could feel a certain unease. Not that he was afraid, certainly far from that, but felt as though he wasn’t meant to be there. The shuttle set down on the deck and Mack disembarked. The air was heavy and the hangar was poorly lit. There was no personnel or crew to be seen, not even a mouse droid. “What the hell have they been doing in here?” Mack whispered to himself as he looked around the hangar. He entered the corridor and the ship looked abandoned or haunted or both. There were strange emblems and markings etched into the walls. Some of the markings appeared to look like dried blood.

Continuing down the corridor, he thought he saw the shadow of a person. He tried reaching out with the Force, but nothing. He felt cut off almost, except for a low humming that wasn’t from the ship’s engines or reactor core. After what felt like forever of wandering and chasing shadows of the strange ship, Mack came into an opening where the lighting was even worse than the hangar. There were candles lit everywhere and about twelve cloaked figures in the center of the room, forming a circle and chanting.

Mack could hear what sounded like muffled pains of agony in between the chanting and slowly moved along the perimeter of the room to get a better view of what was happening. There appeared to be an altar with a man tied down to it and gagged. Mack continued slowly moving along the walls of the room and could see that it was Lieutenant Commander Kryze! Seeing his comrade like this angered Mack and as though the rage that was swelling in him somehow signaled the twelve cloaked figures in the circle, they stopped chanting and all turned to Mack in unison.

No longer having any element of surprise, not that it mattered to Mack at this point, he was becoming blinded by his rage. Mack ignited both lightsabers he had acquired from his previous opponent and took an attack stance. One of the figures spoke, “It is Him”, followed by another figure, “The One who defeated”, and another figure spoke, “our Champion”, a female figure finished the sentence, “Dezz Troy”.

“And you’re about to be next!” Mack cried out.

The cloaked figures began speaking in their hive mind broken speech pattern again. “We are”, “the Emperor’s”, “Twelve of the”, “Sith Eternal”, “You do not”, “Stand a”, “Chance”. The Twelve all raised their hands in unison and began chanting. Mack could tell something was about to happen and he braced himself for an attack. Each of the Twelve conjured a swirling ball of pure Force Lightning in between their hands, all of them aimed directly at Mack. “Prepare to die”, the Twelve all said at once.

Before the Twelve launched their overwhelming attack, a holo image of a giant cloaked head appeared in the room. “ENOUGH!!!” The head bellowed with a raspy voice. The Twelve dissipated their Force Lightning attack and quickly bowed before this image. “We obey, Emperor” the Twelve said in unison. Mack powered down the lightsabers and stared at the image. *‘Is this truly Emperor Palpatine?’* Mack thought to himself.

The head turned towards Mack, still unable to see a face but could clearly see glowing eyes. “I commend you for being able to defeat that whelp, however you can clearly see you cannot defeat the Twelve”, the head said. “You may keep the trophies you’ve claimed, but in return, you will pledge yourself to ***me***.”

Mack thought for a moment, ‘*This is my only opportunity’*. “Fine, but only on one condition”, Mack gestures towards Kryze who’s watching everything wide eyed and in disbelief, “release my friend and my strength will be yours to command.”

“Very well. Release him!” said the head and the Twelve immediately unbound and ungagged the Lieutenant Commander. “Sir! You can’t possibly! They’re freaking fanatics and lunatics!!” Et’sen cried out as soon as he was able to speak and ran over to Mack, who shielded Et’sen behind him.

“There is a shuttle in the hangar bay, get there and immediately leave. Debrief the Grand Master as soon as possible” Mack quickly whispered.

“No, not without you” Et’sen protested.

Mack turned around and looked Et’sen in the eyes and said very sternly, “That is a direct order, now go.” Et’sen saluted Mack and ran as fast as he could to the hangar bay.

Mack turned back around to face the floating holo image of a head and the Twelve, slowly approaching them and kneeled. “What is your bidding, my master?” Mack said with despair in his voice.

To be continued….