

Bestia's Wrath

Summary

Dread Master Bestia set out to avenge her daughter and fight her former boss (Emperor Vitiate), but instead found herself in the position of a Chosen One(tm). Features my versions of the Dread Masters and weird worldbuilding. Enjoy.

Additional warning: swearing

Reposted for posterity because I think it deserves to be seen.

Notes

While I don't plan on continuing this fanfic, even though I feel much better mentally these days, here it is for posterity. I might reuse some plot points and concepts for another story in the future. Or I might not.

Sadly I don't have all the illustrations I made for it anymore, so it won't have those FOR NOW.

Recommended listening for the prologue:

In the End (Rewinder remix)

Goodbye to a World (Porter Robinson)

The Last Transmission

Silence hung over the dark cliffs outside an Imperial outpost. No wildlife cried out, no plant rustled. Even the wind had died down to a silent breeze.

Sharack, a very tall and large Red Sith Jedi dressed in blue robes and a cape with a fluffy white collar, watched the last of the Imperials hurry into a small red shuttle painted with sharp designs of the Dread Guard. One of the gestures of goodwill the Dread Masters made in this mess of a situation. A small move against their former master. Sharack thought those Imperials must be having one hell of a whiplash, getting into a Dread Guard ship while protected by a Jedi and a Republic soldier. A Red Sith Jedi, no less. A Sith Jedi. Or a Jedi Sith. Sharack chuckled at the thought.

The silence weighed heavily upon Sharack's broad shoulders, and she sensed a dark presence honing in on her location. They say that if wildlife suddenly goes quiet, a large predator is around. This couldn't be more true right now, Sharack thought. Vitiate was coming, and the environment itself could sense it. To Vitiate, she was a beacon of the light side, and the Emperor wanted nothing more to snuff the annoying light out. She poked at the gravel with a claw of her robotic foot, just to hear some noise.

She turned to face her brother, Seid. He was almost as tall as her, but that was where their similarities mostly ended. The only other shared trait between them was a white triangular spot on their foreheads that extended into the hair, creating a white forelock. Sharack's skin was a lighter shade of purplish red, her hair was a dark muted red and unruly, and her eyes a bright ice blue, an unusual color for a Red Sith. But there wasn't much usual about Sharack in general. From the eyes, to her height, to her cybernetic legs and tail.

Meanwhile Seid had very dark red skin and bright red hair and eyes. He was clad in gold armor and leaning on his huge assault cannon. They both were bright splashes against the grey environment, but even their colors seemed dulled somehow.

Seid returned her gaze, quizzical and clearly unsettled. He was Force-blind, but even he could feel the oppressive aura of the Sith Emperor. Sharack sighed, raising an arm.

"I'm sorry, brother. This is one fight you can't follow me to."

Before Seid could react, he was lifted off the ground, cannon and all, and floated into the shuttle just as the door started to close.

"WAIT, NO!" He yelled, reaching for the shuttle door.

The door lifted into its slot in the hull and there was a click indicating it was sealed. Seid leaned back against the wall in defeat. His sister had always been reckless. She was incapable of fear, and Seid took the role of the self preservation instinct of the group. He wasn't alone in this task. Sharack's padawan, Kira, helped keep the Jedi out of danger too. However, Kira wasn't here either. The only one of her crew remaining with her now was the astromech droid, T7. The others were either aboard the orbital station, or aboard Sharack's spaceship.

Seid felt the shuttle rumble as it took off. He stood up, found an empty seat and strapped in, towering over the Imperial sitting next to him. He felt as if he failed Sharack, but realistically, what could he do against the full might of the Sith Emperor? It wasn't like the previous time they

faced the emperor., back then Vitiate had been confined to a weak failing body. On top of that, he was recently kicked out of his previous host. Being forced to swap bodies weakened him. Sharack's attack came as a surprise too.

Now? Now he has fed on the conflict between the Empire and the Republic, staged through the effort of a former galactic legend. Thanks to Revan, Vitiate has gained enough strength to erode the wills of more and more Ziest citizens. And now it seemed he was preparing for something. Sharack's chances were slim at best. And yet, she still chose to stay behind.

Sekhmet, the flagship of Dread Master Bestia, floated in Ziest's orbit. Styrak and Bestia stood by the viewport on the bridge, staring silently at the planet. Long ago Ziest was their home. Both of them were born and raised here. And now Bestia was back, only to find the planet in chaos as her former master fed off its population. Bestia's cyan eyes scanned the planet's surface. What was Vitiate doing? What was the point of mind controlling all these people? Was it just a show of power? Was he preparing for something else? Bestia had a sinking feeling it was the latter. She felt restless and angry at being reduced to just standing and watching.

"We should be down there!" She hissed.

"I know, love. But it would require all six of us to stand against Vitiate," Styrak replied, putting a hand on Bestia's shoulder.

"We can summon the others! Oricon isn't that far! We could still make it in time before..."

Bestia's holocom beeped, interrupting her. She unclipped the device off her belt and held it up, pressing the response button. A blue image of Sharack hovered over it, blinking and glitching out. Even through the bad connection, Bestia could make out the determination and sorrow in her daughter's eyes.

"Mom. I just wanted to say it was great to finally meet you, and fight by your side. Both you and dad. I sent Seid to safety, he should be at the GSI station with the last bunch of evacuees. I love you both-"

The transmission distorted and cut off before Bestia could reply. She stared at the now inert communicator, before slowly dropping her hand and looking back at the planet. Nothing changed, at least visually. The Force, however, was a different story. Bestia could sense the fear

of people inside numerous ships that hurried away from Ziost. She could also feel a dark presence swelling in the northern hemisphere of the planet, moving slowly farther North.

There was much that Sharack wanted to say. Particularly to her father. She had already offered an apology before for stabbing him and contributing to his death on Darvannis. Sharack wanted to reiterate it but the signal cut off and didn't come back. Vitiate's presence seemed to mess with electronics and signals. She said what mattered most, the Jedi thought. She regarded the device in her hand grimly before clipping it back to her belt.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the surroundings darken, and raised her eyes. A conglomeration of black shadows loomed over her. The purest black she'd ever seen, rivaled maybe only by the black hole she saw once. She craned her head up until her gaze was met by a pair of hateful black eyes with red infinity sign shaped pupils. Below was a maw filled with glowing red sharp teeth. Too wide, even for the vaguely serpentine face it belonged to. Vitiate's true form, one of pure darkness and malice. Black and red. Colors that in nature usually signify danger. It was, again, fitting.

This would definitely require her big girl lightsaber. Sharack gripped the long hilt of her weapon, twisted, and with a metallic clang it transformed into a lightspear. An even longer cyan blade hissed to life. Her lightsaber was one of a kind, a hilt that could be extended into a polearm, and an extra long blade. Sharack specifically requested those modifications to make use of her height and larger than life nature.

"Let's dance, you bastard!" Sharack called out to the looming shadow.

She then smirked, crouched, and jumped, her cybernetic limbs sending her high into the air. She spun around, making a gigantic sweep across the shadows that made up Vitiate's form. The blue of her blade cut the monster in half, but the damage was short lived. The darkness clamped its teeth down, shutting the light out.

Back in orbit, Bestia squinted at the planet below.

"What is that?.." Bestia murmured, her eyes glued to a dark spot that formed in its northern hemisphere. It was where she sensed the emperor's presence. The spot turned into a dark star that started spreading outward from its source.

Her answer came in the form of excruciating mental pain as the feedback of mass death hit her. Bestia has always been in tune with the Force around her. People, animals, plants. All life had the Force coursing through it and that's what Vitiate was after. He was devouring Ziost, her home planet, like he had once done with his own.

Not many people knew about Nathema, but Bestia and Styrak, as two of the Dread Masters, were aware of it. A green world once called Medriaas. Vitiate's origins were a mystery, but Bestia knew that Medriaas was his birth planet. He rose to power early in his life, taking the place of the planet's ruler. At one point, he called a meeting between many Sith lords under the guise of peace talks. However, it was a trap, and Vitiate conducted a ritual that drained the Sith lords and the planet itself of all life.

Bestia was intimately familiar with Nathema, having spent time in one of the experimental facilities Vitiate had there. He tried to break her, solely for his sick amusement, and possibly to use as a stronger vessel, but failed. It left scars, both physical and mental. Bestia was overcome by a flashback to that time. She leaned on the wall, overwhelmed. And then she felt something ripped away, and realized that Sharack, her daughter, had failed. The daughter that Bestia had only recently found, irreversibly lost to her again. She collapsed to her knees, watching through tears as the darkness made its way around the entire planet, leaving behind barren wastelands. Completely powerless to stop it. She heard a rustle of robes as Styrak knelt next to her, awkwardly wrapping his arms around her shoulders, doing his best to quietly comfort her.

"She's...gone. We just got her back... And now she's gone. Forever."

And Bestia, with all the power of a Dread Master and almost a thousand years of life experience, could do nothing. Styrak stayed silent, but Bestia didn't really need a reply from him. His presence alone was enough. Bestia turned around and buried her still masked face in her husband's chest. He was one of the few who Bestia allowed to see her vulnerable. Styrak held her, watching the dying planet. Even with the distance, Styrak could sense the anguish of countless spirits denied an afterlife of becoming one with the Force. This, too, was one of Vitiate's crimes. He didn't just drain the planet of its life force. The echoes of sentient beings were bound to him so he could feed off them gradually, and they were denied the afterlife of becoming one with the Force.

The black tendrils made their way across the surface in just a few minutes. Just like that, thousands of years of history and culture and millions of years of evolution, were completely snuffed out. Ziost was no more.

A Crossed Line

Chapter Summary

This was the prologue to the original comic version of this story.

Bestia and Styrak investigate the epicenter of the Ziost Cataclysm, hoping to find any trace of Sharack. Then they head back to Oricon and have to deal with Raptus and his boner for boring meetings.

Chapter Notes

Recommended listening for the Ziost part:
Austin, Atlantis (Homestuck vol.9)

Ziost. Once it belonged to the Red Sith, and eventually it became a bustling capital world of the Sith Empire. But now, in one fell swoop, it became a place of **death**. Nothing was left but ashes, crooked dead trees, and empty cities. All life, completely devoured by the entity people here once called their Emperor, and worshipped.

Bestia and Styrak stepped out of their shuttle and onto the ashen ground. Bestia surveyed her surroundings. Everything was gray and completely still, with the exception of ash being blown about in the wind. The air was cold. There was also an absence of sound beyond the howling of wind and odd cracking noises that seemed to have no source. Her ears twitched at the odd noises, and then dropped as she let out a weary sigh.

Long ago, Bestia was born here. She attended the Sith Academy in Adasta. Her first love was here, as well as her greatest failure. She met the other future Dread Masters here. Her mother died here, and now her child as well. This once was home, and now it was gone. At least in the case of her mother, there was a body to bury. Bestia wasn't so sure if the Emperor, responsible for both deaths, would have given the same mercy to Sharack. Sharack was in the very epicenter of the devouring ritual after all. Likely reduced to ash like everything else. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

"These should be the right coordinates," Styrak said quietly, looking at a datapad in his hand.

The place looked the part: it seemed even more barren than the rest. Bestia noticed how the trees were leaning away from a certain area not far ahead.

Bestia wondered how Styrak felt. His emotions have always been somewhat subdued, especially after he returned from the dead. Moreover, his feelings about their Jedi daughter were complicated. Sharack was their child, but she was raised by the Jedi, and as a result, complicit in Styrak's death. Bestia was able to look past that, but Styrak himself was another story. He wasn't much of a family oriented person, so the sentimental value of finding out the fate of his lost children didn't mean to him as much as it did to Bestia. Styrak actively avoided Sharack after the truth had been revealed, and Bestia couldn't fault him. Sharack passed on an apology, and left him alone after that as well. Bestia also wondered if there was a chance that Sharack withstood death like Styrak did. She brushed the thought aside, for now. They had to look for the remains of their child, if there was anything left.

Bestia steeled herself, and walked ahead towards the clearing. It looked like a site of a large explosion, but lacked a crater. Bestia could see the trees and rocks brushed away in a circle, and lines in the ground where Vitiate's power carved away at the soil. There was something else too. A splash of dull blue against the endless gray. Bestia ran up to it and dropped to her knees, digging at the ash. Styrak limped up to her and watched.

A scream full of grief and rage rang out across the wastes as Bestia unearthed a faded blue cape with a fluffy collar that once was white. All that remained of Sharack, the Hero of Tython, the champion of the Jedi Order, and Bestia's own daughter. Lost, found, and lost again.

Styrak moved in closer, unsure on how to comfort her. He could feel echoes of her pain through the Force bond, and wanted to help, but simply didn't know how. Despite the hundreds of years of age and his deep insight into matters of the Dark Side and Sith Alchemy, social and emotional matters still eluded him. He knew from experience that it was best to let Bestia let it all out, and so he opted for putting a hand on her shoulder, to let her know that he was near.

"VITIAE!!! I'LL KILL YOU!!!" Bestia bellowed out, head raised to the empty sky.

A threat. A promise. Bestia squeezed the hand on her shoulder, and then got up. The blue cloak was still clutched in her hand. She sighed, then turned around and started walking back towards the shuttle. Styrak made a move to follow when a shadow caught his eye. He turned around and was confronted with a vision. A figure with enormous black wings covered in a multitude of blue eyes. He gasped, and blinked, and just like that, the vision was gone. All that was left was just a crooked tree with its limbs broken in a vaguely wing-like shape.

"Styrr? Is everything alright?" Bestia noticed that he wasn't following. He made his way to her.

"I had a vision. A figure with wings covered in blue eyes. I think... it was an Undying like me."

He left the rest unspoken. A very slim chance that Sharack wasn't gone. Bestia considered it.

"I won't entertain vain hopes, but I did think about it. I have to find Vitiate regardless. If your vision is true, and she's not gone, I'd likely find her wherever Vitiate is. If not, at least I'll have revenge. Maybe all six of us have a chance against him. If the others can be roused."

Styrak nodded, still thinking about his vision. He wondered if there were others like him. If he could return from the dead via a ritual conducted by his apprentices, what prevented other powerful Force users from doing so as well? He hasn't known Sharack very well, but he knew how powerful she was in the Force first hand. She stood her ground against him once. She stood against Bestia as well. She also had a dogged drive to see Vitiate gone. He wondered if those two were enough to create another Undying.

Undying. This was what Styrak had named his present condition. A state between life and death. He suspected he was now a type of Force Demon or Force Wound. His body was mostly intact, aside from curious dark scales that grew over his right arm and leg that were the most damaged in his final stand on Darvannis. He had also discovered a few new abilities since his resurrection. One of those was the ability to manifest shadowy wings with red eye patterns on the edges. He also discovered, much to his chagrin, that he couldn't use his Dread Master powers anymore. Any attempt to conjure Force Fear turned on him, making him relive every horrible moment of his demise. He wasn't sure if his inability to call on his Dread Master powers was because of his undead state, or simply the result of trauma he sustained. He had seen the power attempt to turn on Bestia and Calphayus, and feed off their traumatic memories too. He mentally filed the thought away for later research.

The two Dread Masters made their way into the shuttle, and it soon took off towards the destroyer hovering high above. They were completely unaware of a tall figure that watched them leave from a distance. The figure spread its dark shadowy wings, and jumped into the air, flying up in the opposite direction, and soon disappearing into the sky. The figure had a trail to follow. A Force equivalent of a scent. The hunt was far from over.

Seid stood leaning against a wall by a large viewport within the space station. He was cradling a drink in one hand, and was staring listlessly into space. Some part of him hoped he'd see a shuttle of some kind, that would bring his sister in. But mostly, he knew deep down she was

gone. A shadow suddenly passed by, and Seid leaned forward. It was gone as soon as it appeared, but it was far too small to be a ship, and far too dark against the black of space to make out any details. He sighed, and shrugged. Maybe it was a drone of some kind.

Oricon, Outer Rim. It was early evening when Styrak and Bestia landed. The sky was for once clear of the fumes and clouds that tended to choke it, but still had a faint orange tint to it. The two Dread Masters stepped out onto the walled shuttle pad inside the Dread Palace grounds. They were met by a Dread Guard, who knelt before them.

"My lords, Lord Raptus requires your presence in the council chamber."

"Can't. Wait." Bestia groaned. Styrak just sighed and nodded at the guard, dismissing them.

Both Dread Masters reached for the golden triangle medallions at their collarbone, and pressed them, bringing forth their crested masks in a cloud of golden particles. Bestia had no idea why Raptus required the masks during the council meetings no one else was allowed in. They already knew each other's faces, and they weren't going to engage with the Phobis Devices. It seemed like an unnecessary piece of ceremony to her, but then again, most of the meetings themselves were unnecessary in her opinion. Bestia hated those meetings, which she voiced, for the hundredth time, on the way to the chamber.

"Why do we even have so many meetings? They're absolutely pointless most of the time."

"I agree," Styrak nodded.

"I suppose something DID happen this time but honestly, it could be resolved via a written report or message, which I actually sent on the way here, along with the reports made by the Dread guard."

Bestia let out an exasperated breath.

"Let's be bloody real. The meetings literally just exist because Raptus likes hearing himself talk."

She threw her hands up in the air.

"Nothing gets bloody done! We should be looking for Vitiate! Avenging our child!"

Styrak sighed. He could sense the grief and exhaustion that Bestia was battling.

"The meetings are draining. Raptus...is draining."

Styrak hated the meetings too. He didn't like to socialize in general. Being around people was extremely draining and often overwhelming for him, especially Raptus. He could tolerate the other four Dread Masters, and Bestia was one of the few people who actually weren't draining. Raptus, however, didn't respect his boundaries. He didn't listen. And he never bloody shut his mouth. The amount of times Styrak considered surgically removing Raptus's vocal cords and tongue was probably in five figure numbers at this point.

Quietly fuming, the two stopped before a sliding stone gate. Bestia sighed as it moved open with a loud grinding sound that made Styrak wince. Bestia gently patted him on the back.

"I know, love. Hold on a bit longer. Just, this one last bit of bullshit, and we can rest," she said.

They stepped into the Dread Council chamber. It was the heart of the Dread Palace. A cavernous space with a platform suspended above a shallow pool. Six thrones hovered along the platform's sides, connected to it by chains, and the whole room was bathed in dim sickly green light. Here the Dread Masters held their meetings and communed with the Phobis Devices through the large upside down pyramid conduit that hung from the ceiling. Most of the meetings were fairly pointless and existed purely to amuse Dread Master Raptus's ego. However, occasionally the meetings did have a purpose of dealing with important events. This seemed to be one such meeting, as Bestia and Styrak stepped onto the center platform to bring the news of Ziost's destruction in person.

Four other Dread Masters occupied the thrones, all dressed in mostly identical red robes and gold masks. Calphayus, the prophet, and Bestia's father, was hunched in his seat, shaking. His robes lacked the bone shoulder attachments and had a small fur collar on them. Brontes, the

other woman in the group besides Bestia, sat straight. She was lean and had a long white ponytail draped over one of her shoulders. Raptus sat leaning forward with his hands clasped under his chin. He was thin, short, and frail. His short stature was well compensated by his strength in the Force though. He was the only one who seemed to enjoy the gathering. And finally, in the rightmost throne sat Tyrans. Or rather, he was half reclined in it. Bestia had long noticed that the lower Tyrans's head was relative to his throne, the more bored he was, to the point where he would occasionally slide off the throne completely, land in the pool, and flee using one of his shortcuts. Currently the boredom levels seemed slightly higher than average.

Styrak cleared his throat.

"Ziost is no more. The planet itself is intact but there's no life, sentient or otherwise, left on its surface. There were no survivors beyond those who evacuated in time."

His voice was somewhat high pitched and soft, in contrast to his body type. He used the Force to have his normally quiet voice be heard. Bestia, however, was angry enough to not even need such enhancements.

"Vitiate has repeated what he did on Nathema a thousand years ago. His power is growing, and I think it's pretty clear that he no longer views the Empire as worth sparing. I think he will try to destroy all the life in the galaxy. I propose we destroy him first. All six of us have enough power to do so! Will the rest of you join me?"

She went to great efforts to conceal the grief in her voice. She didn't want Raptus to know. Whilst most of the motivation she had was personal, she made sure to appeal to a more general threat Vitiate posed to all of them.

Raptus, in turn, tilted his head a little.

"And why should we? He is not bothering us. The Empire and the Republic can fend for themselves. And what is this rag you are carrying?"

He nodded in the direction of the blue cloak that Bestia was holding. She saw red momentarily, and it took her a few moments to gain enough composure to not tear Raptus limb from limb. She took a deep breath, huffed it out, rolled her eyes under the mask, and put her hands on her hips.

"Did you even hear what I said or did it get drowned out by the sound of your own ego? Vitiate will destroy the galaxy. We live in the galaxy. And we did turn our back on him, a decision that YOU pioneered because you wanted your own empire with pazaak and hookers. Sooner or later, he will come for us. And I'd rather take the fight to him and stop it in its root than sit on my ass jerking my ego off like SOME do."

"You supported the decision to leave the Empire, did you not?"

"I did, for personal reasons that I don't want to talk about. Unless you want me to send you graphic flashbacks to my time on Nathema over the Force bond. I doubt you need more nightmares than you already have."

That did make Raptus back off. Brontes used the blessed silence to speak up. Her voice was deep and melodic.

"There is also the matter of those rumors of unknown forces attacking Outer Rim worlds. Might I remind Lord Raptus that Oricon is an Outer Rim world? We are in the line of fire. I do not know if these forces are allied with our former emperor though. Still, taking him out would remove at least one threat and let us focus on more... Mundane concerns."

Tyrans raised an arm in agreement, still mostly draped over his throne, although he seemed to sit up a little during Raptus and Bestia's argument.

"I agree with both Bestia and Brontes. We can shore up Oricon's defenses in case those unknown forces pay us a visit. I suggest we look into reinstalling that stealth generator we had. Whoever those forces are, they can't attack a planet they can't find. Then we can take the fight to Vitiate. I think all six of us have a chance. I would also take our strongest apprentices. If it fails, at least it would be a glorious way to die."

He half laid back down in his seat, curious as to what the others would say.

"I am having troubling visions. More and more timelines are snuffed out. Time is running out." Calphayus piped up. There was weariness and fear in his voice, and he was still visibly shaking. He seemed to want to say something else, but his eyes started glowing, and he stood up clumsily, clearly in the grip of another vision. All the other Dread Masters quieted down and stared.

"Time is running out. All paths lead to disaster. One of us will..."

Calphayus didn't finish his prophecy, his body going limp and tipping forward, towards the gap between the large central stage and the small platform that housed his throne. Bestia's eyes went wide, and she bolted towards him, catching him under the arms. She then carried him to the center of the large platform and laid him down on the floor.

"I... don't feel good," he mumbled softly, sitting up and reaching for the gold medallion on his chest. It glowed, and Calphayus's mask was absorbed by it in a stream of gold particles revealing an older Red Sith with dark orange skin, a square face, fluffy greying hair, sideburns, and peculiar eyes. They were cyan, the same color as Bestia's, but looked shattered, the pupils in odd shapes and no solid boundary between the iris and the almost non-existent whites. All in all, Dread Master Calphayus looked decidedly not threatening. In fact, he looked terrified.

Bestia put a hand on his shoulder.

"Are you okay? Must have been quite a vision."

She turned to Raptus

"I'll take father to his sanctum so he can rest," Bestia helped Calphayus up, putting one of his arms over her shoulders.

"Fine, you can leave," Raptus said dismissively, clearly trying to sound as offended and inconvenienced as he could.

Bestia led Calphayus along, stopping by Styrak on the way out.

"Love, I'm sorry I have to leave you here."

"I think I'll manage," He said quietly to her. "It's likely going to be tactical plans and such. I can deal with that."

Bestia nodded, and wished him good luck. She brought Calphayus to the stairs that led to the chamber, and carefully sat him down, and sat next to him, deactivating her mask. They enjoyed the quiet for a bit.

"Father?"

"Hm?"

"Are you okay? We can rest here but I'm afraid Raptus might try to drag us back inside."

Calphayus shook his head solemnly

"Not really, I'm afraid. The visions have been... a lot, lately," he let out a tired sigh. "What about you?"

"Angry. Tired. Grieving. Full of rage at Vitiate. I don't know."

She shrugged. How could she even process something like that in the relatively short time it took to get from Ziost to Oricon? She was in pain, yes, but at the moment it was overshadowed by a desire to vanquish the one responsible. It seemed losing Sharack finally tipped some sort of scale in her mind in favour of fighting what essentially was a god, to avenge her child, herself, and both of her parents.

"Vitiate sure has it out for our family, doesn't he?"

Calphayus hummed in agreement.

"I think he was jealous that your mother chose me, a low born half human, over him, a god-emperor."

"That's a weirdly... ordinary sentiment for him to have."

"I suppose it is. The more likely reason is that we know. We know he killed her. And all of this has been just an elaborate ruse to shut up the only witnesses."

"I think he just likes tormenting people," Bestia spat, "He reminds me of Raptus in that regard."

Bestia wondered to herself if the two were related. Now that was a disturbing thought.

"What did you see in that vision?"

"Death. Like Ziost. Like Nathema in the past. Timelines where someone stands in his path, and the more timelines I see, the more times that someone... is you. I couldn't see beyond that point."

Bestia's ears drooped.

"Maybe it's for the best. I just watched my own child die with Ziost. It's not an experience I would recommend."

"I am so sorry," Calphayus said softly. "I wish I could say that it is going to be okay, but with the visions I am getting... I am sorry, again."

"So I'll make it okay. I'll find Sharack if she's an Undying like Styrak saw and is out there. I'll fight Vitiate. You won't have visions of death anymore."

"That... would be nice." Calphayus managed a weak smile. Bestia stood up.

"Let's get you to your room. Before Raptus comes out and forces us to go back in."

Calphayus nodded, and the two walked down the main hall and under one of the arches that led off to different areas of the palace. This one led them to a sprawling garden. Calphayus has always been good with plants, and gardening brought him peace of mind, so over time, he turned his sanctum into a lush green space, completely at odds with the rest of Oricon which was mostly obsidian cliffs and pools of lava. What plant life there was, was twisted by the other Dread Masters' experiments.

There was a main road that cut the garden in half, widening in the center to give space for a platform with a throne on it, flanked by two tables. The road continued beyond, to a pair of doors in the back that led to Calphayus's chambers. Bestia stopped before the throne.

"Good night, father."

"Good night," Calphayus said, walking ahead and disappearing in the doorway.

Bestia was alone now. She looked at the stars for guidance. But they were silent because of course they were. The stars weren't living entities that could offer anything, but looking at them brought Bestia some degree of peace. She sighed, thinking back to the Dread Council meeting. She felt completely drained, so she didn't want to go back in there. She turned around and walked slowly towards her own rooms, her posture hunched and worn out, the grief finally catching up to her. It is her room where she finally hung the torn cloak on a mannequin that usually held her robes and allowed herself to cry. Alone, privately, where Raptus couldn't mock her and others couldn't offer well-meaning but empty platitudes.

When Styrak stumbled into the room later, completely drained by having to deal with the council, Bestia was already asleep. At least he thought she was, opting to let her be. He whispered a quiet "good night" before settling down on his side of the bed and drifting off.

Several hours later, Bestia sat on the edge of her bed, brooding over a decision that was already made. The elaborate scars on her back itched, a faint reminder of what Vitiate had put her through. She didn't get visions like Calphayus or the others. The most Bestia got were gut feelings and vague premonitions. Right now, she felt like she had to leave now, or not at all. It was clear that Raptus didn't care enough to lend his power to the six, and without all six of the Dread Masters and their combined power, they stood no chance. Sure, they could replace Raptus with that one apprentice they had inducted into the Dread Union when Styrak was torn from it, just to prevent them all from completely succumbing to their own powers. Would it be enough? Would her going off alone matter? She supposed it did, as it still was better than sitting around and waiting for Vitiate to come around and destroy them. Even alone, she was powerful and resourceful. She would find some other weakness in Vitiate, and use it against him. It would have to be enough.

Mu'hass sat inside the surveillance station, watching a series of holocam feeds showing various places within the Dread Palace. One of the screens drew his attention, a feed showing the main hallway of the palace. He saw Bestia walk down it, determination in her step, and her mask on.

He thought it somewhat odd for his mother to wear the mask to what probably was just a late night walk. She wasn't one to wear it much inside the palace. He didn't question it though. Maybe she was just going for a late walk. She was going through a lot, after all. Mu'hass shrugged, and let it go.

Oricon, next morning. Styrak woke up and stretched with a mighty yawn. He then sat up, bleary eyed, mumbling a good morning in the general direction of Bestia's side of the bed. And then he turned, and Bestia wasn't there. Styrak shrugged, and reached out through the Force bond to know where she was, but to his surprise, he found a wall. She was hiding her presence, but he could tell she was no longer on Oricon. And then he realized: Bestia had gone off on her own, to exact her revenge.

Chasing Death

Chapter Summary

Bestia joins forces with an unlikely ally, but her efforts seem to be in vain. She and Marr are captured, and brought before an Emperor.

The halls of Darth Marr's Destroyer were suspiciously empty as Bestia made her way to the bridge. Few people ducked behind corners as she passed, both Imperial and Republic soldiers watching her warily from their hiding spots. The Dread Master could sense the fear and apprehension. It came with the territory, she supposed. She didn't pay them any mind, as she had more important things to worry about.

She finally made her way to the bridge, the first place on the ship where people didn't hide, although the imperial officers at the computers eyed her with the same apprehension others did. She came to stand beside Darth Marr, the current de facto leader of the Empire. He was almost as tall and large as Styrak, dressed in grey and red armor with spikes on his shoulders and countless wires and cables that probably delivered adrenals and enhancers right into his blood. Bestia knew of Marr, he'd risen to power shortly before her and the other Dread Masters' imprisonment. No one has ever seen the man's face, and a legend went around the Empire, that the one person who did, committed suicide soon after. Must be one scary face, Bestia thought. If things were different, she would consider inviting him to join the Dread Masters. For now, she'd have to settle for joining forces.

"I can sense the Emperor." Marr stated.

"I can smell that reek across the bloody Galaxy on a good day..."

She wouldn't have sided with people who wanted her dead on a good day either. If the Republic, preferring a more diplomatic approach to most things, as advised by their Jedi, mostly wanted the Dread Masters to surrender, the Empire's representatives consistently called for complete extermination of every Dread Guard, and the destruction of Oricon. Today was not a good day. Bestia wondered if Marr intended to hold up his end of the deal. He was, after all, the one who led the imperial efforts against the Dread Masters in the past. The deal was: Bestia assists the coalition with tracking down Vitiate, and the empire agrees to leave the Dread Masters alone. Provided, there would be an empire and Dread Masters when it's all over.

"He is out there." Marr mused, before turning his head towards Bestia. "What of the other Dread Masters?"

"I was unable to rouse them. I am, however, the strongest of the six, so my power combined with that of the coalition will have to be enough."

"I see."

"If I'm going to die, I fully intend to take Vitiate with me."

Marr didn't respond to that, but Bestia imagined he wouldn't have qualms with both his enemies being destroyed. They stared into the void of space. A purple nebula spanned most of the view. Suddenly, a streak of blue light spun past the nose of the ship, disappearing in the space ahead. As soon as it vanished, rows upon rows of cross shaped vessels emerged from hyperspace before Bestia and Marr. There were hundreds, if not thousands of them, far outnumbering the Coalition's meager forces.

"I've never seen ships like those before." She stared at them in awe. "We are so fucked."

Sirens blared, signaling a hostile presence on board. An imperial officer fretted over his computer.

"My lord! All decks report a hostile presence!"

Bestia stretched, and cracked her shoulders. Finally, a problem she could solve immediately with a lightsaber and a couple fear blasts. None of this vague talking bullshit.

"I will deal with it," she proclaimed, before heading towards the exit.

It turned out the invaders were all droids, so Bestia's fear powers were useless. Still, she merrily hacked them apart with her lightsaber claw weapons. She ran through the endless corridors hacking and slashing away. For a moment, she even forgot about all the emotional anguish she'd been in since Zios. For a moment, she could tune it out. She rounded a corner, coming at two more droids from behind and slashing them to pieces. One of the droids' head clattered to the floor, stopping next to two pairs of boots. Bestia looked up, at the boots' owners. Two soldiers stared back, frozen in fear. A door was behind them, sealed with an energy field.

"Do you need assistance?" Bestia asked. It took the two a few moments to shake off the vision of a horrible beast they were confronted with. It dissipated, leaving behind a tall muscular woman in a red robe that was missing its sleeves, revealing thick bright orange arms. She was also wearing a golden mask with a half circle crest in front and two wings extending from around the eyes. The imperial came around first.

"My lord! The enemy has overrun this section!"

"We have wounded left there!" The Republic soldier seemed to find his tongue.

They started arguing whether or not they could help a few wounded men left in the sealed off section. It was overrun with droids, and the Imperial, whose name Bestia learned was Dol, argued that they should cut their losses and close the section off completely. The Republic soldier, ever the moral one, insisted on extracting the wounded first. They bickered back and forth, seemingly forgetting that Bestia was there.

"Okay I get it. I can handle a couple more droids."

It took the two men a few moments to regain their composure.

"Uhhh, sure, my lord. If it pleases you." The Imperial said, moving out of the way.

"Give me like, five to ten minutes." Bestia said as the energy field dissipated. She sprinted down the corridor and disappeared from view. The two soldiers could only listen to the sounds of fighting and droid screams. It really did take her only a few minutes to deal with the problem. She emerged, floating a severed black and gold droid head above her open palm with the Force.

"You can come retrieve your wounded."

Her holocom beeped, and she threw the droid head over her shoulder to answer it. It was Marr.

"The enemy is after the reactor. Meet me there."

This one didn't mince words, Bestia thought as she sprinted down more corridors. Styrak would probably have liked him, were the circumstances different. Light flashed in Bestia's peripheral vision, and she jumped, shielding herself from an explosion. That was close, she thought, looking back at the burning wreck that was the section she was in moments ago.

She found Marr in one of the service back tunnels, standing over an enormous pile of droid parts.

"Damn, leave some for me!"

"The bridge is secure for now. But without main power we WILL be destroyed."

Marr didn't react to her joke, just motioned ahead, where the reactor control room was. They fought through more droids, until they were about to enter the room, but Marr stopped Bestia in her tracks.

"Hey," she protested.

"Silence. The enemy is already here."

He was right. There was a large mean looking droid guarding the control panel. The largest one Bestia had seen so far. She peered into the room from behind a corner, and noticed the catwalks running along the perimeter. She didn't have the tactical genius of her fellow Dread Master, Tyrans, but she could scrounge together a simple plan from studying the environment.

"I got an idea. You distract it, and I go around and drop from above."

"So be it," Marr uttered.

Marr rushed in, drawing the big droid's attention. Bestia waited a few moments, before slipping inside the room and to the side, leaping up into the catwalks. There were weaker droids there, but they were no match for her. She made her way to the opposite side of the room, and jumped down onto the large droid, slicing through the cables that kept its head attached. Droid builders sure do like imposing their organic sensibilities onto their creations, Bestia thought. The droid's processing unit, the equivalent of brain, was in its equivalent of head, and cutting that off killed it as surely as any organic.

The two Sith stepped over the droid, and leaned over the reactor controls. A holo appeared, of the same fretful officer from before. The holo glitched and cut out, and the officer was panicked.

"The bridge has been overrun, I repeat, the bridge-"

There was a sound of blaster fire, and the holo cut off. They were really screwed now. Bestia looked at the controls, assessing their options. They could send the power to the ship's thrusters and ram the enemy fleet, going out in a blaze of glory. The other choice was to send the power to shields and give as many a chance to escape as possible. Bestia thought back to the immensity of the fleet. Taking out a few ships would be an equivalent of a petty tantrum at best. It wouldn't mean anything. Letting as many escape as possible seemed equally meaningless,

but it would mean those people, including herself, would survive. They would be able to fight again, with the experience gained here. And she would be able to continue her pursuit of Vitiate.

"We could either route the remaining power to the shields and try an escape, or to the thrusters and try to ram the nearest fleet ship. And probably die. As much as I love fighting, and as much as I expected death, I'm not feeling like heroic sacrifice today. Not unless it's against Vitiate."

Before Marr could interject, Bestia keyed in the command, and the control panel informed her that the power had been sent to shields. She then patched herself into the ship's speaker system.

"This is Dread Master Bestia speaking. The ship is falling apart. I have bought you time. Use it to escape, and live to fight another day!"

She turned to Marr.

"We should go, too."

They turned and ran through the burning ship to the escape pods, and climbed into one. As it prepared for launch, Bestia stared out of the window. Despite the very real threat of death, she felt calm. As if something within her knew it was far from over.

"I don't have the gift of prophecy... But I get gut feelings," she started.

"And what do your gut feelings tell you now?"

"Death would be too easy of an end. For me, at least. It's not over yet."

A few moments later, in another escape pod that ejected earlier, Ralo and Dol watched as the shields protecting Marr's ship crumbled to nothing. With one last salvo from the enemy fleet, the ship exploded silently.

Bestia woke up to the sight of a human with a face half covered by an awkwardly cut mask looming over her. He had pale skin and shaved hair, and the single visible eye was an odd shade of orange. Kind of more pink. His face seemed young, but with so much of it obscured Bestia couldn't tell. To Bestia, human men seemed to usually either look like they were twenty, or like they were fifty. He was wearing white robes and had two guards just behind him. His voice was grating when he spoke.

"You've awakened. Good. I trust you can walk."

Bestia slowly sat up, blinking. Her wrists were tied in bulky shackles. She recognized Force bindings, and chuckled internally. The last time those were able to hold her was when she was much, much younger and way weaker. These cuffs were quite strong, but Bestia was sure she could overload them and break out if need be. She decided to play along first, and get her bearings.

"What is this place?" She asked.

"You didn't even know whose territory you've invaded?" The half mask said in a condescending tone. Bestia was immediately besieged by a desire to pull his tongue out of his throat just so he'd shut up.

Bestia shoved the violent impulse down, stood up, and followed the human. She seemed to be in some sort of a medical bay, judging by the rows of beds. But it could as well have been a holding area, judging by the energy fields at the doors. The design of everything was unfamiliar. It reminded her of the white and gold scheme the Republic usually had going on in their buildings, but was far more geometric.

The Dread Master was escorted out, and met with another group of guards leading Marr out of a similar cell. He was in a similar state with his hands bound, and exuded seething resentment for everything around him. At least they agreed on that, Bestia thought. They both were ushered along a series of corridors that grew more and more fancy. The same white and gold geometric designs repeated here as well, etched into the floor tiles, and arches, and projected onto the golden energy windows. Guards clad in gold armor stood at even intervals, holding shields and lightsaber spears. Bestia could sense the faint echoes of the Force in them, dulled by her shackles, but curiously, it was neither light nor dark. Local flavor of Force users, Bestia mused. Like the mystics of Voss her father liked to visit once in a while, to discuss visions of the future.

The half mask kept blabbering.

"We've recovered the information from the ship's computers. Fascinating reading. You Sith are quite formidable."

He turned around and walked backwards, addressing Marr and Bestia.

"Especially you, Dread Master. And you, Darth Marr. To alter the course of galactic events as you both have... Quite impressive."

Bestia's only response was to raise her hands, middle fingers proudly extended. They might have bound her wrists, but they did not restrain her ability to perform ancient and universally known gestures of defiance. Was it immature? Yes. Was it immensely satisfying? Also yes. Half mask raised a visible eyebrow.

"I hope you will find your voice soon. You will need it."

There were quiet footsteps and a rustling of fabric approaching from ahead. Bestia looked over to see an older man walking towards them, frowning. Everything about him was extremely pale. His hair was white, and his eyes matched, and glowed. He wore black robes with small bits of gold armor over his chest and waist. Unfamiliar runes ran along the edge of the lowered hood and along the layered skirt. Another person in identical robes followed him, slightly hunched, but their hood was up and their face was obscured by a mask made of a gilded skull of some beast. The half mask clearly didn't like the old man. Bestia could practically feel the sneer.

"Heskal. Still waiting for the catastrophe your Scions foresaw?" He asked mockingly.

"You may close your ears to the whispers of fate, my Prince, but you will never silence them." Heskal's voice had a whining quality about it. It was a voice of someone who utterly resigned to whatever their fate was.

"How about I silence YOU?" Prince Half-mask moved into Heskai's face threateningly. The old man stepped aside, and Bestia swore she could hear an inhuman growl emanate from Heskai's companion. It didn't seem to phase their captor though.

"Take your superstitions elsewhere. They, and you, are not needed here."

The Prince then proceeded to roughly shove Heskai out of the way, sending him tumbling to the floor. Heskai's companion growled again, but chose to help the old man up instead. They waited for the procession to pass, and then followed at a distance. Bestia's earlier comparison to the mystics of Voss seemed more apt now. At least some of the Force users here seemed to deal with visions of the future.

"Is this why you brought us here? To see you bicker with soothsayers?" Marr asked. Bestia kept to her silence, but the indignance in the other Sith's voice amused her. It seemed like he shared her observation of their captor being an obnoxious man-child.

"Come along." The white robed man said, and his guards poked Bestia and Marr with their weapons, ushering them forward.

"You are taking us to your master?"

"I'm taking you to my father. Valkorion, the Immortal Emperor of Zakuul."

"An Emperor? Just what we were looking for," Marr responded.

Bestia perked up. They were, indeed, looking for an Emperor, and while the name "Zakuul" didn't ring any bells, the name "Valkorion" seemed familiar to her, even though she couldn't place it. It could easily be just another emperor, as many planetary rulers bore the title, but it could also be Vitiate. She couldn't sense any presences at that distance as her Force abilities were restricted. They would have to find out.

"You will not find what you wanted here." Half mask said.

They were herded into an elevator, and the ride was immensely awkward, as the two Scions from before crowded in as well. Skull mask glared absolute daggers at the Prince the whole time, shielding Heskai with their body. Bestia took some measure of petty comfort in knowing that even the locals seemed to dislike the man.

A minute later, they stepped out into a huge room. It was a sphere, holding the top section of a spire that jutted past the planet's cloud cover. The sky outside was filled with stars. A long platform led forward, towards a rise on which sat a white and gold throne. Shallow pools of water lined the platform's edges, and intricate golden geometric designs decorated the floor. The throne room was dimly lit by floor lights along the walkway, and a large light directly above the throne. Two rows of tall lights flanked the approach to the throne.

The Scions stopped to join their fellows by the entrance. Heskai still was rubbing the shoulder he hit when he was shoved. The Prince, the two captive Sith, and the guards, proceeded forward towards the throne. And then Bestia looked up, and her gaze fell upon the old man occupying it. Her vision blurred, and the man's features shifted into a younger version of himself. Black hair and beard, gentle and tired grey eyes.

"Welcome," He and his past self said, mockingly.

Bestia remembered him. Valkorion. He occupied a cell adjacent to hers when Vitiate kept her prisoner on Nathema. They talked to pass the time. It seemed that Valkorion wasn't as resilient or lucky as her, and was broken into a vessel for Vitiate to use. His presence hit her in the face like the stench of all the spoiled food and rotting meat in the galaxy, even with her perception dulled. She snarled in disgust, internally pitying the man she once met on Nathema. If this really was the same Valkorion, Vitiate must have extended his life span. Which would explain the "immortal" title.

"VITATE! Can't mistake YOUR foul presence for anything!" Bestia shouted. She could hear confused murmurs of the natives gathered. They clearly didn't know.

"A new name. A new face. Those are not enough to hide from us." Marr seemed to recognize Vitiate as well.

Vitiate commanded his vessel to rise, and walk down the throne's steps. His movements were stiff and unnatural, and he stood there with arms stretched out to the sides as if about to embrace everyone, and a disgusting, unnaturally wide grin on his vessel's face. Bestia could

see the black eyes with the red horizontal pupils now. She wondered if anyone else saw through the illusion.

"Oh I think a mistake has been made. But by whom?" He purred mockingly. In another context, Bestia would have thought the voice was nice, but now, knowing who was in charge of the body, it disgusted her.

"Gee Vitiate, how come you get to have TWO empires and not tell us? Your supposed favorites? You're full of shit, as usual," she spat on the fancy blue and gold floor.

"I was going to tell you. Eventually. This empire was my focus. My work of art. My crown achieve-"

He was not allowed to finish his speech, as another snarl came from behind Bestia and Marr. It was distorted somehow, and accompanied by a heavy clang of metal on the floor. Bestia turned her head at the sound and froze, her eyes wide.

Sharack stood there. Her daughter, who died on Ziost. Except she seemed all wrong now. Black scales covered most of her face and the entirety of her arms, and her presence in the Force felt wrong. The same kind of odd Styrak's felt after he returned, but magnified tenfold. It seemed Styrak's vision didn't lie, and the galaxy now had two Undying revenants haunting it.

"No..." Bestia choked out. Sharack paid her no mind, completely focused on Vitiate.

"Oh quit your lying bullshit!"

She turned to the Knights and Scions gathered, pointing at Vitiate with both her fingers. The nearest knights shuffled as far away from her as their duty allowed.

"Are all of you blind, deaf, and comatose? This thing you call Emperor has drained all life from two planets to fuel his supposed "immortality". What makes you think you aren't next? I've seen enough of your plump happy little faces, to know that you're his next meal!!!"

Vitiate didn't respond, just tilted his vessel's head to the side with an unsettling crack. Bestia cringed at the sound.

"Vitiate tried to kill me, and I turned into THIS. Granted, I'm not sure if it's his doing or I was just too stubborn to die. It doesn't matter. He will kill you all, and then devour the rest of the bloody galaxy, you pompous fucking wankers."

Her metal tail lashed from side to side in anger.

"I should just spare you by kicking all of your asses off this mortal coil," she huffed angrily, rolling her eyes. "I dragged myself from the other side for THIS?"

To his credit, Vitiate at least didn't interrupt. He stood in the same pose the whole time though. Bestia pitied his vessel once again.

"You presume limits to my power. There are none. Your endeavor? Completely futile and pointless."

He extended an arm towards Marr, and his bindings were undone with a click, and fell to the floor. He continued:

"Unless... you wish to accept defeat and join me. I would hate such powerful beings die in vain. KNEEL BEFORE ME. And together, we can bring order and prosperity to the ga-."

He didn't get a chance to finish, as Marr bellowed out:

"NEVER! I will never again kneel to you!!!"

"Pff, join you?!! And end up like the poor sod you're possessing right now, or slurped up as a snack later on? Thanks but no," Bestia said.

Marr used the Force to grab the spear from the nearest Knight, and then looked over at Sharack and Bestia. The two women stared back at him, confused for a moment, until in a flash of blue, their shackles were cut. Bestia and Sharack stared down at their freed hands for a moment, feeling the Force flow through their bodies again. There was a sound of hurried footsteps, and Knights charged at them. Bestia raised her hands, and the Knights crumpled, screaming in fear. The remaining knight kept charging. Bestia dodged a stab of his spear, and picked him up, throwing him at more assailants. To her side, Sharack delivered a massive kick into a knight's midsection, sending him flying off the platform. She had picked up a spear one of the Knights dropped. Bestia looked over at Vitiate.

He was holding onto the side of his head. The vessel picked the worst moment to be wilful it seemed. Vitiate pushed him down with a growl. He needed to deal with these rampaging nuisances now. He would make sure his vessel is well and truly punished later on. First, Marr. Vitiate raised a hand, and blasted the Sith with a massive bolt of lightning. Even with his armor and resilience, Marr stood no chance. He fell to the ground, and rolled a short distance by the sheer force of the blast.

Sharack and Bestia stared at Marr's lifeless body for a moment, before shadowy wings spread from behind Sharack's back, and she charged towards Vitiate. Bestia could only stand there, watching. The Prince stepped in the way, raising his lightsaber into a defensive stance. Before he could do anything, Sharack backhanded him so hard that he flew across the room and landed at the base of one of the lights along the walkway. Sharack loomed over Vitiate's vessel, being at least two heads taller. She grabbed his vessel by the throat, lifting him up easily. Vitiate made a choked sound that shifted into a softer groan. His eye changed color from black with red infinity shaped pupils to a more human grey. His eyes were tired and full of despair.

"Do it. Free me. Please," Valkorion managed to croak out.

Sharack looked at him, a small measure of pity in her stare, and nodded. A quick stab of the lightsaber, and Valkorion's body slumped on the floor. Sharack stepped back, watching as dark presence started seeping from him, coagulating into a humanoid shape.

Everyone stared in horror as the shape grew bigger and more solid, a tall lanky humanoid with long hair floating up towards the ceiling with his arms outstretched. A surge of power erupted from Vitiate when he finally exited Valkorion's body. Sharack hunched, raising her arms to shield herself. She stood strong while almost everyone else was knocked back and unconscious.

Vitiate floated up towards the dome, intent on escaping. Sharack screamed in pure rage, wings spreading once again, and jumped into the air in pursuit. Vitiate looked back, and hurriedly phased right through the reinforced glass and into space. The glass didn't stop Sharack either as she broke through. Sirens started howling behind her, quickly cut off by the emergency energy field. Now it was just her, complete silence, and Vitiate's fleeing true form.

Arcann's eyes slowly came open. Everything was blurred, but he saw a dark presence erupt from his father, and fly away, and the demon followed it. There was a crash of glass, a whoosh of air being sucked out, and an alarm ringing. It stopped shortly, the energy field resealing the dome. The demon was unfazed by the vacuum of space. It was where they found her after all. The odd creature actually managed to take out one of the Eternal Fleet ships with her gigantic lightsaber before being knocked out by a targeted blast. And now she killed his father, the emperor, and escaped. Which left him in an interesting situation.

The prince got up, leaning against the light fixture, and then walked slowly towards the throne. He could hear groans as knights and Scions were regaining consciousness. He stopped by Valkorion's body and nudged it with a foot. Yep. Dead as a doornail with a lightsaber stab wound through his chest.

Arcann sneered, and kept ascending. Someone had to take control of the Eternal Fleet. Otherwise it threatened to go haywire. He had an explanation to come up with. After all, it's not like he could tell people the truth, as it was far too outlandish. Their beloved emperor, killed by a winged space demon, and apparently host to a dark presence of some kind. An unbidden thought came in: what if that dark entity was responsible for all his suffering, and pitted him against his twin brother, resulting in his death? What if this entity was his actual father? What if he was part whatever it was?! He shoved the thoughts down, and his eyes landed on the other Outlander still unconscious on the floor. He would pin the death on her. And maybe on the Scions. He really hated the Scions.

Arcann watched as two Knights started to drag the Outlander away. The Scions were awake, swarming over Valkorion's body. They picked the old man up, and took him away to give him his last rites. At least the Scions were good for SOMETHING, Arcann thought. He would wait till after the funeral to banish them. He pressed a button on the throne's armrest, patching him into every holo display on the planet. And so he started his inaugural address.

"People of Zakuul. Our beloved Emperor, Valkorion, is dead, murdered by an Outlander. The assassin will receive swift and just punishment. This act of unprovoked aggression will be answered. As your new Emperor, I promise that Zakuul's enemies will face the full power of the Eternal Throne. And every last one of the Core Worlds will BURN."

Bestia was half conscious as she was loaded into the carbonite chamber. She felt the cold creeping up her body. The Prince's speech blared in the background. Guess Vitiata had one last laugh, with her clearly being framed for his vessel's death. She would have one last petty laugh of her own, as she managed to raise her arms, her middle fingers extended. Might as well be immortalised in one last gesture of defiance. Last thing she heard before blackness took her was a knight swearing at something, either her own petty act, or something else.

Chapter End Notes

Flipped bird count: 4

Shattered Days

Chapter Summary

Bestia is having a trip and a half. My version of the dreamscape chapter from KOTFE, tailored to Bestia's past.

Chapter Notes

Suggested listening for this part: Eternity Served Cold (Homestuck). The slowed down version in particular fits really well.

Bestia floated among the stars, somehow immune to the vacuum and cold of space. In front of her was an enormous black hole wreathed in orange matter. It spun slowly against the dark red background. She was being pulled towards it, and couldn't move. A black hand suddenly emerged from the black hole, the same complete empty black as the hole itself and outlined in flames. It reached out towards Bestia, and she watched helplessly. She lifted crossed arms in front of her face in a vain attempt at defending herself. The hand clamped down on her, and then there was a burst of warm golden light. It was blinding, and Bestia shut her eyes. When she reopened them, she could see the remnants of the black hole closing and dissipating before her.

There was a flash of the same golden light behind her, and she wheeled around, to see a frail old man floating there. He was short, pale, and his hair was grey and fluffy. He was dressed in a simple white tunic with wide sleeves and a long skirt. There was a jagged tattoo running all around his neck in a wicked approximation of a collar. Bestia recognized him as Vitiate's latest vessel, Valkorion, and bristled immediately.

“YOU!” She shouted.

Valkorion raised his hands in a pacifying motion. The sleeves slipped down to reveal jagged lines of scars that circled his thin wrists.

"It's okay. I understand your hostility. Feel free to not believe me, but I am not Vitiate," he said gently.

Bestia didn't sense Vitiate's presence on him, and decided to humor him.

"What is this place?" Bestia waved an arm at their surroundings. The space around them was now filled with stars.

"You are sleeping. Your body is trapped and poisoned by the carbonite prison. What I did just now was repel an attack from Tenebrae, who tried to possess you."

"Ah, a mindscape. Figures. Thanks for the save. I really appreciate it. Sorry for shouting at you."

"You are welcome. What does Tenebrae want from you?"

Valkorion nodded, floating cross legged. Bestia followed his example. If they were to have a sad little heart to heart, might as well get comfortable.

"Vitiate has a grudge against me. Probably because I never groveled before him like he thinks everyone should, and because I saw him kill my mother. And maybe he's jealous of my big strong arms. He's tried to possess me many times but I managed to resist him so far."

She flexed an arm. Her Dread Master robes lacked sleeves exactly for the purpose of showing off her arms. Valkorion nodded, acknowledging the show, then smiled sadly.

"I am afraid I cannot say the same. I am not in possession of a will strong enough to resist him nor big arms. Being stuck on the throne for centuries is... withering."

"I gathered as much. I saw you in the throne room. I remembered you from back on Nathema."

"What did you do to earn his attention?" Bestia asked once done settling in.

"I wish I knew. I hazard a guess it was my power in the Force, and my isolated position. I lived in a tribe, and I discovered something about the gods we worshipped, and the tribe exiled me for

speaking what they deemed heresy. I was left completely alone to fend for myself. Which... I don't know about your species, but humans are social creatures. Even the ones who love solitude need company from time to time. Being alone for so long messed with my mind. So when Tenebrae showed up, I clung to him. He was my only company. So I did everything he asked of me. I think I even fell in love with him. I went up against the machines that held our gods captive. Tenebrae lent me his power, and I was able to free the gods, one by one. They granted me boons. Extended life span. Strength in the Force beyond what I had. But with every time I accepted Tenebrae's help, he'd erode my will. Until, shortly after I established the beginnings of the first city, he took over. And since then, I was forced to watch."

His voice grew more and more broken as he went on, spilling his story. Bestia felt pity towards him. He reminded her of her father in a way. Both gentle souls pulled into things against their will, tormented by Vitiate for the crime of existing. She sighed, and reached out through the Force bond that linked her to the other Dread Masters. She couldn't sense anything, but it didn't feel torn and raw like it did when Styrak died. So at least that was good.

"I'm so sorry," She finally said. "I hope you'll find peace in the Force. You deserve it."

"I do not know if I'm dead yet. The wound that your child has inflicted was fatal, true, but Heskai is a great healer. Our lives are in balance for now, which is why we're here."

He paused, looking up and away, as if he heard something.

"Speaking of which. It seems I have to go now. They are trying to awaken me. I suppose my life is not over yet."

"See you in the real world then. We have Vitiate ass to kick."

"I do hope our paths will cross again."

He gave Bestia another sad smile, a small glimmer of hope in his eyes. And then, he disappeared. Bestia watched the space he occupied for a few moments. Her surroundings changed, the starry void giving way to orange cloud-choked sky, and Bestia found herself floating by the spire of the Dread Palace. The golden glow of the Phobis Device housed there was blinding, causing her to shield her eyes and look down. Two figures were moving down along the spire: Rammas, the odd Sith apprentice, was free falling, guiding her descent via

Force telekinesis, and Tyrans, one of the Dread Masters, was zapping around on red energy wings. Rammas's eyes were closed, and Tyrans's mask was off, revealing a narrow face and a spiky white mullet of hair. This was their idea of fun, and were Bestia there and in a better mental state, she would have joined them. As the ground approached, Rammas opened her eyes. Black, a red line around a black horizontal pupil. Her hands shot forward, a blast of Force telekinesis stopping her rapid descent. She and Tyrans landed in front of one of the side entrances to the palace.

Bestia floated towards them.

"Tyrans?" She called out tentatively.

Neither him nor Rammas seemed to hear her, although Tyrans looked over his shoulder, puzzled. His eyes widened as a shadow fell over his face. Rammas turned to look too, her expression matching Tyrans's. Bestia spun around, to face a sky full of the same cross-shaped ships that attacked her and Marr. The Eternal Fleet. The force that has been attacking Outer Rim worlds.

Tyrans scowled and activated his mask, the wings spreading as he took off. Alarms went off, and Bestia could only watch as energy blasts started raining down all around. Dread Guard scuttled below, hurrying to board ships and either fight the invaders or escape. She watched as Tyrans met up with his sister Brontes up in the air, the two expertly weaving among the blasts. Despite the distance, she could hear their conversation.

"I've scanned the ships. Minimal life forms. The bulk of the forces are droids." Brontes said.

"Meaning our power won't work against them..." Tyrans sounded disappointed.

"We could hack them."

"Turn them against each other?"

"...Or give them a virus or two and watch them self-destruct. Or even assume control." Brontes added to her brother's suggestion.

"We'll need time though. I'm not familiar with this tech."

"Neither am I. It's nothing like I've seen before. Not Gree, not Rakata..." she spun around and away from a blast from one of the ships. "I wonder if it has to do with Bestia's sudden departure."

"Yeah. She left and suddenly these bastards show up. Weird, but could be an inevitable result of Oricon being in the line of fire." Tyrans shrugged. "If we want to hack this, we'll need a sample. And we'll need time and space to analyse it."

"I suppose this calls for a tactical retreat then."

A particularly big blast fell upon the Dread palace, destroying one of the side spires.

"I hate to say it but no matter how I calculate it..." Tyrans watched the spire crumble as more and more energy rained from above. "Oricon's lost. We need to get the Devices, get our sample, and escape."

The two of them patched into the communications, sounding their retreat. Ships full of Dread guards scattered away from the planet. Many were shot down, but some escaped. A huge explosion hit the main spire of the Dread Palace, and she momentarily blacked out, seeing in flashes a vision of ships and shuttles scattering. Pain wracked her body. It was like Ziost all over again, she thought. There were other visions too, showing her fellow Dread Masters escaping: Raptus entering a shuttle. Brontes and Tyrans piloting a ship. Calphayus as well, his eyes glowing as he navigated through his own visions to one where he could escape. Styrak supported his son Mu'hass and Rammas, an expression of pure terror on his face. Ever since Darvannis, he was deathly afraid of fire.

Pain overwhelmed Bestia, and she blacked out, only to wake up face down on cold stone. She lifted herself up slowly, looking around. She was in a bleak and damp place. An empty courtyard of some kind, with unfinished walls and shapeless piles scattered all over. With horror Bestia recognized the scene. The site of her biggest failure. The piles were dismembered bodies of many species. She looked down on her hands, and saw blood on them, and more blood staining the stones beneath. It started to rain, and the rain was blood too. This was a memory Bestia had buried as deep as she could. A great source of shame for her. A moment of lost control that resulted in deaths of thousands not even equipped to fight a raging Sith. Other Sith celebrated her for this, but to her the memory was wrong and sickening, a proof of her failure to control her rage. Those people were slaves. As far as Bestia was concerned, these people deserved to be free, and be paid for their work. They didn't deserve to die like that, killed by a sith berserker who just happened to be here. And then the Imperial sycophants painted the massacre as Bestia stopping a rebellion all by herself. It was pitiful, laughable, and shameful. Bestia swore to conquer her rage on that day but the memories never stopped haunting her. The rain got thicker, and Bestia scrambled to run away, but as much as she tried, she stayed in place. The blood rose higher and higher, until Bestia drowned in it.

She woke up and sat up with a scream. Her surroundings were grey and covered in ash. She looked at her hands, and there was no blood. She recognized Zios's barren landscape. Her eyes were drawn to a figure floating next to a cliff nearby. The figure turned, face half concealed in shadow. Electric blue eyes glowed back at Bestia, same colour as her own. Sharack floated silently as Bestia reached out a hand to her daughter. The scene suddenly moved as if something was pulling Bestia farther away.

She blinked, and then found herself face down again, on the floor of the throne room of Zakuul. She stood up, and saw the half mask prince, now emperor, sitting on the throne, with three figures kneeling before him: a Sith, a human, and between them, a golden masked figure in elaborate robes.

"What is HE doing here?!" Bestia said out loud, frowning.

Come to think of it, it was in character for Raptus to bend his knee to someone powerful. Strength and power were one of the few things he respected. The only reason he stuck with the other Dread Masters was that they were the strongest thing around, and they had a Force Bond tying them together. A Force Bond that might have been his idea to begin with. Let's bind our minds together, he said. It will increase our power, he said. Bestia huffed. He might be kneeling to save his hide too, she thought. She then noticed a young woman in black prowling around until she stopped in front of the Pureblood, staring right at her. Her eyes were bright glowing yellow of someone who dove deep into the Dark Side of the Force.

"You... can see me?" Bestia asked in astonishment. The woman must have been astonishingly strong in the Force. Or it was dream logic.

The woman didn't answer, but pulled out a lightsaber from her belt.

"What is it," The emperor asked.

"Oh shut up, brother," The woman retorted, yellow eyes still boring into Bestia.

She then turned the lightsaber on, the golden blade stabbing right through the space Bestia occupied. The pain was surprisingly real, and Bestia doubled over. Darkness took over again,

but was pierced by patches of blindingly white light, a hissing noise, and a vaguely familiar voice.

"Wake up. You're dying."

The Escape

Chapter Summary

Lana finds Bestia and gets her out of the city together with Koth.

Warning for Bestia dropping at least one F-bomb.

Blinding light. Hissing. Equally blinding pain all over her body. She couldn't move. She couldn't see. Was this how she'd die: like a helpless beast?

"I have a cure, but it will hurt." A voice stated matter of fact. It sounded like Brontes's voice but Bestia knew it wasn't. Brontes didn't deal in cures. A needle was jammed into Bestia's shoulder. She screamed, falling forward on her hands and knees. The world came into view, blurry. The room was dim, and Bestia felt metal underneath her. A coughing fit overtook her, filling her mouth with a metallic taste. She sat up, squinting at the person before her. Her vision was still extremely blurry, so she could mostly see a golden yellow blob on top of a dark grey blob. Definitely not Brontes. The voice seemed awfully familiar though.

"Weren't you on Zioist?" Bestia managed to rasp out.

"Yes. My name is Lana Beniko."

Lana. The Sith who reached out both to the Dread Masters and the Republic during the Zioist crisis. Lana was maybe one of the few Imperials who weren't openly hostile towards Bestia and the other Dread Masters. But she was also willing to work with a Jedi, so Bestia wasn't exactly surprised. Sharack seemed to like Lana too. Bestia even vaguely remembered the Jedi hitting on the short Sith.

"Oh yea the new head of Sith Intelligence. I remember you, I think. Hello."

Bestia got up and made a few clumsy steps towards a bunch of containers behind the carbonate slab, and started rummaging around, looking for something.

"Thought they'd stash my claws here, but I guess not."

As she was digging through skytrooper parts, she heard a series of beeps and turned to see a familiar silver and blue astromech with blue flames painted on the sides.

"Isn't this Sharack's droid?" Bestia asked, recognizing the flames. Sharack had made a point of showing them off. An awkward silence, then Lana spoke up, looking sullen.

"Yes. I found him on the surface of Zioist after... After the cataclysm. I understand that you are Sharack's mother. I am sorry."

Bestia sighed, feeling a pang of grief, overshadowed by the physical pain she was in. She walked over and put a hand on Lana's shoulder.

"Condolences accepted. But "Sorry" won't fix things, nor will it stop Vitiate. Let's go."

"You still have no weapon."

"There's nothing here for me to use. I'll find something on the way. For now, the Force will have to suffice."

They jogged along endless corridors and hallways, fighting through skytroopers.

"I'm not sure if it really happened or if it was the part of the weird dreams I was having in Carbonite..." Bestia muttered, throwing a crate at a skytrooper with enough force to break it in half. "But I saw Sharack. I thought she died, and I suppose in a way she did. She's... Kind of like my husband now. This Force entity. An Undying, as my husband named it. She was in the throne room with me and Marr, and killed the poor sod the people here called their Emperor. Vitiate was using him as a host."

"I know. I have crossed paths with Sharack."

"Is she alright? She didn't even pay attention to me in the throne room."

"I cannot say. She has changed a lot and we didn't talk much."

They walked down the oddly empty corridor.

"There's less resistance than I expected."

"T7. He generated alerts in other sections of the storage facility."

"Storage facility?"

"Yes. This is where Arcann stores his prized possessions. Doesn't it make you feel special?"

"No, it makes me feel... ogled. Like an object. And not even in a sexy way. At least he couldn't display me on a wall, unless he wanted a wall decoration that literally says "FUCK YOU.""

Lana didn't respond, but her expression went blank as she recalled the pose she found Bestia's frozen body in: with middle fingers proudly on display. She decided to not dwell on it. An obstacle in the form of a huge sealed door came before them. A hatch that no doubt could be opened by slicing into a terminal or another, or asking T7 to do so, but they simply didn't have the time.

"I got the door." Lana said, stepping up. She raised her arms towards it, fingers crooked into claws as she channeled the Force through them. Bestia watched her struggle, barely managing to pry the halves of the bulkhead open.

"No. *I* got the door."

Bestia stepped up, palms held together in front of her, pointing at the middle of the door. She let the Force flow, and then opened her arms rapidly as if doing a swimmer stroke. The gate was ripped open with a sickening screech, leaving a hole large enough for the two to run through. Bestia felt the consequences right away as pain flared up in her chest, and she coughed. She stumbled and looked down at her hand. A dark red stain marred her glove. Shit. Lana's comm beeped, and an unfamiliar man's voice spoke from it.

"An update would be good. Have you found the outlander yet? I'm starting to feel a little exposed over here."

"Yes. I patched her in." She motioned for Bestia to come over.

"I'm Koth Vortena. And this is the most suicidal rescue mission in history." The man introduced himself.

"I'm Bestia. Let's do it."

They kept running, but Bestia had trouble keeping up. Overwhelmed by pain, she leaned onto a nearby terminal, waking it up. A series of feeds lit up the screen. One of them showed the woman in black from the throne room walking up to the empty carbonite chamber. She then looked up, raised a hand, and the camera went to static.

"Huh. I've seen her before. I was dreaming in carbonite and at one point, I was in the throne room. She could somehow see me and stabbed me with a lightsaber."

"Vaylin. She is powerful. I don't think we stand a chance against her."

"I could take her. I have 800 years of experience."

Bestia started coughing again.

"Okay, maybe not in my current state."

"The medicine should kick in shortly, but we still must hurry and get to the extraction point."

Bestia nodded, and two continued their escape. There was blaster fire heard over the comm channel that was never closed.

"Koth? Is everything alright?" Lana asked.

"Nothing i can't handle but we need to move the pickup."

Lana sighed.

"We don't have time for this."

"Well if I land now they'll shoot me to pieces!"

"What's the new location?" Bestia butted in.

"Just duck through another tower and I'll find you. Back with you shortly."

Bestia sighed, and the two kept walking until they reached an elevator.

"No way but forward I guess," Bestia said.

"I guess."

Bestia and Lana stepped inside. A few moments of awkward silence passed.

"What." Bestia erupted, tired of Lana drilling holes in her with her stare.

"I didn't expect to find..."

"A dread master?"

"Well, yes."

"Fair. We have a reputation. Still, I appreciate the save. So, who's Koth?"

"A native of Zakuul who doesn't support Arcann."

"And Arcann is...?"

"The new emperor of Zakuul."

Bestia now had names for both the half mask brat, and his sister.

"You probably have other questions."

"I doubt you have answers, Lana. Unless you have the locations of the other five Dread Masters."

"Afraid not."

The doors opened and the two stepped into what looked like an office space. It was a sharp contrast to grey dimly lit corridors from before: clean and bright with more of those geometric designs woven into the architecture. It seemed abandoned by any human personnel like the storage facility though. Bestia walled past a cubicle entrance, and saw a woman huddling there, absolutely terrified. The first human she'd seen aside from Lana and Vaylin over the feed. The woman stared up at her in fear. Bestia walked on.

The two made their way through the offices, dispatching a few more skytroopers on the way, and finally reached an exit. Bestia peered out and let out a long, tired sigh as her gaze landed on the assault walker that guarded the bridge beyond.

"Ah shit here we go again."

She didn't look forward to the fight. She normally liked fighting, but in her current state, and still lacking a weapon, it was a pain. Suddenly, she sensed something. There was a living human being inside the walker, meaning her Dread Master powers were useful for once. She let her power loose, a black and red glow enveloping her, shadow beasts forming inside the blackness and tearing towards the enemy.

"A living being... KNOW FEAR."

Lana was about to engage the droid, when shadows swarmed it. A muffled scream rang out from the inside, and the walker started thrashing, until it stumbled towards the edge of the bridge, tipped over, and fell from view. Lana jogged towards the bent railing, watching the walker fade from view down below. So this was the power of a Dread Master. Bestia walked over, and looked down too. She then bent over the railing in a coughing fit.

"Oof there goes my spleen." She managed.

Lana threw one of Bestia's arms over her shoulders, and helped her walk towards the other tower. As they made their way across the bridge and into the building, they were watched. Vaylin stood on a platform a floor above.

"Hm. Not the way I'd pick." Her voice gleeful, she turned around, facing towards the nearest sun reactor. The things were all over the city, harnessing the heat and energy of miniature suns to provide power. Vaylin raised her arms, and huge chunks were torn off the reactor's plating, and hurled at the tower Bestia and Lana just entered moments ago.

"I'm too old for this shit." Bestia sighed, leaning against the door she and Lana just ducked through. Lana was catching her breath too, when an explosion shook the tower, knocking her to the floor.

"Oh, COME ON!" Bestia yelled out in exasperation.

Koth was panicking over the comm.

"What happened?!"

"Vaylin happened!" Lana cried out.

"And why are you inside a FUCKING droid factory?!"

"I don't know. Maybe cause this was the other tower you told us to duck through?" Bestia threw a freshly made skytrooper at its peers with the Force.

Alarms started going off, announcing a reactor failure and instructing everyone to evacuate. The whole building was shaking. The two women made their way through the actual factory, somehow avoiding falling off the glass platforms that had no railings, and destroying more

droids along the way. They probably were responsible for a considerable dent in Zakuul's droid economy at this point.

They came to a control room of some kind that overlooked the reactor. It seemed to hold a small sun inside, but was damaged too much to contain the sun's energy, causing it to fluctuate on the edge of collapse, or an explosion. Panicked workers scurried about, screaming. Bestia caught one by the front of the jacket. If their prince was any indication, they should at least know Galactic Basic.

"How to turn this off?"

"There's...There's an emergency switch in the back. Two of them!" the technician pointed behind him, at two pillars at the back of a series of catwalks that circled the reactor."It's too dangerous! It's going to blow any moment!"

Bestia ran up to the door leading out. Just as she was about to step out, a bolt of electricity struck the space in front of her, causing her to recoil. And then a hand grabbed her by the back of her jacket.

"We need to leave! You heard him. It's going to explode any moment, and we need to GO!"

Bestia turned around, snarling, unhappy with being handled like a child.

"The explosion will provide cover!" Lana kept arguing.

"No it won't. We'll get caught in the blast. It's less dangerous if we turn it off."

Then Bestia picked Lana up and jumped through the air and over most of the catwalk. Lana yelled and protested the whole time. Bestia put her down and gave her a nudge towards the other control panel.

“Go turn off the other one!”

“Ugh. Fine, but if we die, I am haunting you.”

Bestia allowed herself a chuckle as her hands flew over the console. Inexplicably, the screen was in Aurebesh and she could read it. She would wonder about it later. It seemed Lana was successful in turning her half of the switch off, as the red indicator on the screen started lowering to orange, then yellow. The sun was still unstable, though, lashing out with flames and electricity. Bestia then had a hunch about the conduits back in the control room, so she sprinted back, and Lana followed her. She caught up with Bestia as she stood before the conduits.

“That’s it. I’m taking you with me, whether you like it or not.”

“I don’t like your tone.” Bestia said calmly.

She reached over and grabbed Lana’s lightsaber off her belt, turned it on, and threw it at the conduits. There was a bright flash, and a knockback wave that sent Bestia onto the floor. She was used to being shocked by inhuman amounts of electricity though. It took her a few moments to get her bearings, and she sat up, watching as protective shields came over the sun reactor, containing it. Lights went out in the city all around. Bestia got up, and headed to the nearest elevator. Anywhere was better than here, and it seemed it would lead to an exit.

“Damn your stubbornness! How did you even stay alive for almost a thousand years?!” Lana exploded once they were inside the elevator.

Bestia shrugged. She marveled at her continued existence herself at times.

“Honestly? I don’t know. As a holonet meme I saw once goes, the risk I took was calculated, but man, am I bad at maths...”

Lana growled at her.

“Okay okay. It was Styrak and the others. We look out for each other. The Sith should really try teamwork some time.”

Lana seemed to accept that answer. The two women stepped out of the elevator and found themselves on a series of platforms, landing pads, and more catwalks. Clearly some sort of a

staff area. With the power cut, the surrounding spires were lit by the setting sun, reflecting bright orange off the glass windows.

“Koth? What’s your status?” Lana didn’t waste any time sightseeing.

“Uhhh, ran into a little maintenance issue...” There was a loud explosion in the background.
“Give me about three minutes.”

Lana sighed. Bestia nodded. There was a whooshing sound and more skytroopers came up from below.

“Three minutes. Got it.” Bestia grumbled.

Slightly more than three minutes and far too many decimated droids later, the two make their way onto a landing pad. It’s eerily empty, compared to the endless barrage they had suffered before. It didn’t stay empty, as two Knights in golden armor jumped from a catwalk above, and pointed their lightsaber spears at Bestia. She grunted.

“Outlander! You are guilty of assassinating our immortal Emperor! Surrender and face justice!”

Bestia rolled her eyes.

“If he’s so immortal, then how come he’s dead?”

This seemed to cross some wires inside the knights’ brains. Bestia didn’t wait for them to resolve their internal connection issues, and summoned up a red and black blast of Force Fear. When the knights looked over, they saw a huge beast of shadows and teeth bearing down on them.

"I AM GUILTY OF NOTHING. NOW, FUCK OFF, OR ELSE." Bestia bellowed, unleashing torrents of pure dread upon the knights.

Both of them huddled over in fear, heads turning this way and that as their childhood fears of beasts lurking in the swamps of Zakuul were dredged up and conjured before their very eyes. The shorter knight backed away.

"Away! Cursed Beast!" He sliced the air with his lightsaber, while his compatriot seemed more keen on fleeing. He jumped back up onto the catwalks.

"Run, run!"

And run the short knight would, if he weren't picked up by the throat, choking. Lana seemed intent on choking the life out of him. Bestia stepped in.

"Drop him. We don't have time for this."

"So they could come back for us again?"

"So I could scare the shit out of them again?" Bestia shrugged. She held two discarded lightspears in her hand. Finally, a weapon. Not her first choice, but she'd adapt.

They made their way to the landing pad. It was a dead end, and there suddenly was a heavy oppressive presence behind them. They turned around, seeing Vaylin who had finally caught up with them.

"I know the Outlander here. My dear brother is very intent on making a scapebeast out of her. But you..." She stared at Lana. "You, I don't know."

"You know I didn't kill your Emperor. You saw what happened. Let us go." Bestia tried to reason.

"Nah. Didn't come out all the way here to leave with no bloodshed. That, and brother's tantrums are really annoying."

"Go, I'll hold her off," Lana pleaded.

"No. I'm tired of running. If I'm to die, at least I want to go fighting." Bestia held up both spears, ready to fight to the death.

There was a deep humming noise coming from below, and the two sun around to see a shuttle rise from below. They saw Koth in the pilot seat.

"HEADS DOWN EYES CLOSED RUN LIKE HELL!!!"

And run they did. Lana made the jump to the open ramp, but Bestia had to duck as a piece of the catwalk was torn out and thrown at the shuttle, causing it to veer sideways, its wing on fire. She jumped and barely made it, clinging onto the ramp like the pantran in that one holomovie her son liked so much. At least, she hoped, there wouldn't be a treacherous sibling to throw her down to her death. Instead a hand came down and grabbed her by the scruff, pulling painfully at her hair. It pulled her up effortlessly, and then deposited her onto the floor of the ship.

"Thanks" she managed. The ramp closed behind her, and she crawled to sit in a corner.

The shuttle struggled to fly, barely dodging the shots from nearby gun placements. At least until they suddenly were powered down, and a silver astromech with blue flames on its sides rolled away proudly.

Bestia sat in the corner, her mask off, and completely exhausted. Lana's cure seemed to have worked, and her organs weren't trying to kill themselves as actively. Still, she felt off. She could feel the dreadseed she bonded with, stitching her insides fixed, but in the process, claiming more of her body. She needed to find Styrak, or at least a Force healer. She reached out to the other Dread Masters, but could barely sense anything. They didn't feel dead at least, but it seemed like the Carbonite messed with something. Or maybe the others were hiding.

"This will be a short ride" Koth said, piloting the ship through a tunnel that led outside the city spire." Catch our new friend up on the last five years."

Bestia froze.

“Wait. The last WHAT NOW?!”

Chapter End Notes

For maximum effect, play "Roundabout" so it starts exactly when you read the last line.

On the Run

Chapter Summary

Bestia, Lana, and Koth crash-land in the swamps outside a Zakuulan spire. They must survive, hide from Arcann's troops, and figure out a way off-planet

Chapter Notes

The comic I was drawing that I based this fic on actually petered out at the midpoint of this chapter.

Recommended listening for the spring scene: "Under the Stars" by Hans Zimmer (Lion King OST)

The early evening peace of the swamps outside the Spire was interrupted by the screaming of a burning ship's engines. Its occupants scurried inside, trying to find a way to put out the fires.

“Did you think to grab fire extinguishers when you stole the ship, Koth?!” Lana shouted, using the Force to smother the flames in vain.

Koth swore under his breath, jumping from his seat. Bestia finally got a look at him. A human, like all zakuulans seemed to be. Brown skin, darker brown hair in short dreadlocks held back by the goggles sitting on his forehead. Small scars on the cheeks, from some past disease most likely. Small neat beard. Green and brown jacket and an odd pendant that looked like a head with four eyes.

"Hey, Outlander, can you take over? See what you can do with this!"

"Sure. Don't expect gentle driving though," Bestia said, taking his place at the steering wheel.

She forced the steering as high up as it would go, to somewhat soften the landing. The ship crashed through branches and foliage, and skidded to a stop in a pile of dirt. The four occupants hastily escaped, afraid it might blow up. Koth and Lana stared at the burning wreck. Koth was scratching his head, and Lana had her hands on her hips.

"Well, this isn't flying us anywhere..." Bestia sighed.

"That's another shuttle you owe me!" Koth said, pointing an accusing finger at Lana.

"You stole that one. It shouldn't count."

"Well it was mine when it crashed, so it counts!"

Lana couldn't really argue with that logic and just threw her hands in the air in defeat. Bestia stepped away from the light, and peered into the jungle before her.

"Where are we anyway?" she called out over her shoulder.

"The Endless Swamp. Not much out here. Some old ruins, few people, and the usual grumpy wildlife."

An animal call pierced the silence. At least beasts were easy to deal with, Bestia thought. Sometimes Bestia truly agreed with Styrak on animals being way easier to handle than sentients. Animals had no ulterior motives, they followed their instincts and treated you the way you treated them. If you were kind and respected them, they would leave you be. If not, well, you'd have brought it on yourself.

"Confirmation: my sensors have picked up a large metallic object nearby. Analysis suggests a large technological construct, but there are no energy readings. Permission to investigate?"

Koth sighed and nodded at the droid.

"Whatever it is, it's gonna have better chances of flying than this mess." He pointed at the remnants of the shuttle.

"We need to hide the wreck. Skytroopers likely won't be far behind us."

"Ok. I scavenge, you bury."

The two humans seemed to have it sorted. That left Bestia on her own. She walked up to HK.

"Let's investigate those readings, HK. I need some time alone anyway."

The Pureblood and the droid walked off into the jungle. It was surprisingly easy to navigate. Canals of shallow stagnant water made for excellent walking trails, if you didn't mind getting your feet wet. Huge trees rose from the swampy ground, their roots forming natural caves underneath, illuminated by glowing plants and mushrooms.

"Question: how does this meatbag know my designation? We were not introduced." HK asked.

"Ooooh, let me tell you a story. So, I was in jail with my friends for almost thirty years. And at one point, my oldest son tried to bust me out of jail with a ship full of HK droids. They seemed to be an older model than you, but looked similar enough."

Bestia walked towards a nearby cliff edge, and peered down. A huge metallic hull rose from the muck, covered in vines and other vegetation. It's plating had a pattern that reminded Bestia of scales.

"Is this what your sensors picked up?"

"Confirmation: yes."

"Let's call the others and let them know. This kinda looks like an old spaceship."

Back at the crash site, Lana and Koth stood over a big mound of dirt and foliage, completely covering the wreck. Lana's holocom beeped.

"Lana. Koth. HK found something. You should come see," Bestia said.

Soon, both of them joined Bestia and HK in the valley the derelict ship occupied.

"So what am I looking at? Lana asked.

"I think it's an old spaceship of some kind. I don't know if it can be fixed enough to fly us out of here, but it could serve as shelter for now."

"Pffff....Outlanders." Koth snorted. "Do you realize what you've found? If my hunch is correct, this is the Gravestone!"

Bestia and Lana exchanged skeptical looks.

"Man. That is one cheery name." Bestia commented.

"The Gravestone was a legendary ship that went up against the Eternal Fleet AND WON. It's older than Valkorion, probably older than Zakuul itself. Whoever had it, hid it after they defeated the fleet, though. And now WE find it. This is destiny, I'm telling you!"

"I don't believe in destiny." Lana said.

"Destiny or not. This thing is our best chance of escape for now. IF we can fix it." Bestia shrugged. "Let's check out the inside."

The inside of the ship was slightly less overgrown than the outside. The group split up: Bestia took on the task of chasing out any wildlife, while Koth and Lana explored. When they met again, in a large room that seemed to be a lounge of some sort once, Koth was lugging a metal box with a handle and a couple of speakers. He carefully placed it on a table. Lana raised an eyebrow but didn't pry.

"We have shelter, but we still need food and water. Water first."

"I'll see if there's any tools I could use to begin the repairs." Koth said.

The mention of food made Bestia's stomach growl painfully. She followed Lana outside, levitating a few empty canisters and hoping to see any familiar edible plants or animals along the way. Mostly, she listened to Lana relay to her the events of the last five years.

Neither Empire nor the Republic stood a chance against Zakuul. The Eternal Fleet was simply too advanced and numerous. Both capitals were blockaded, forcing both factions to surrender by the end of the first year. Battle stations were placed over several planets to watch for uprisings. On top of that, Zakuul demanded heavy tribute that choked out any trade or potential.

Bestia nodded along as Lana talked, thinking how it matched the clues within her dream. They found several derelict water filters in the swamp, probably put there by the few people that lived here. The filters either were empty or weren't working. Instead Bestia took the lead, following a small stream to its source.

It was a small pond that formed under the roots of a gigantic tree, the space large enough for both Bestia and Lana to stand comfortably with room to spare. Lana knelt down on the shore, fished out a small scanner from her pocket, and aimed it at the water. It beeped, and its small screen flashed with data.

"A freshwater spring. This water should be safe for drinking. Would you mind standing guard just in case?"

"Sure," Bestia shrugged, and moved to stand by one of the pillar-like roots, facing outside.

Her presence alone has kept the wildlife at bay, a by-product of her more nature oriented Dread Master powers. She used the time to look around. The pond was shallow, but had a deeper section closer to the back. The water was clear, and seemed a bright cyan from the glow of luminescent fungi growing from the tree roots. Fireflies danced above the surface, causing yellow reflections to bounce around. It was a peaceful place, and Bestia thought that, if the circumstances were different, she'd bring Styra here for a small date. She missed her husband, and the thought of having been separated from him filled her with bitterness.

"So this has been the five years I missed because some petulant brat decided to use me as a glorified wall decoration? Both the Empire and the Republic just went to shit?"

Lana looked away from the water, and hummed in agreement.

"That about sums it up, yes."

"I appreciate the information. In exchange, here's what I sort of know. I say "sort of" because all of this I saw in visions while frozen, and while we are prophets, I'm not Calphayus. You want visions of any possible timeline laid out in neat untangled sequences served with tea? You ask him." Bestia said, pacing around a bit. "Anyway. I saw Oricon bombed by the eternal fleet, and the other Dread Masters have scattered. I saw Raptus pledging himself to Arcann together with representatives of the Empire and the Republic. So if there is any of the surviving Dread Guards fighting on Arcann's side, they are likely Raptus's servants."

Bestia sighed.

"I think we need to find the other Dread Masters."

"You mean YOU need to find them?"

"Yeah, this IS personal. Two of them are my family. Still, my personal feelings aside, we are most powerful together, and it would be an asset against Arcann and Vitiate."

Styrak had the resources to deal with the lingering damage faulty carbon freezing caused, Bestia thought. While Lana's medicine took care of most of the effects, Bestia could still sense a wrongness about her insides. Faint aches, a metallic taste in the back of her mouth, a faint writhing feeling as the dreadseed she bonded with during her lengthy research hastened to patch up damaged tissue. It was acting as it was meant to, but she'd rather not let it claim more of her body than needed. All that, and Bestia simply missed her husband.

Bestia paused, looking up at the small fragments of the sky visible through the foliage. She let out a sigh.

"After Ziost, I was so stricken with grief and rage, that I swore to end Vitiate. My plan was for all six of us to confront him. I think we would have stood a chance. However, my plan shattered against Raptus's complacency."

Bestia stopped and turned to face Lana, eyes full of anger.

"And now we're scattered, Oricon is destroyed, and I lost five years of my fucking life. I know it's nothing for an immortal being like me, but I could have spent the time coming up with a better plan to use against Vitiate. I'm beginning to think Raptus is playing against the other Dread Masters, but I don't know why he would do that."

Lana listened to the Red Sith rant, while levitating water into barrels, her face impassive.

"I have studied the Dread Masters, and I would not be surprised in the slightest if Lord Raptus had an agenda of his own."

"I'm glad we're on the same page here. When I find him, he owes me an explanation. I would kill him but you likely know what happened when Styrak briefly died. I would rather not have that happen again."

Lana finished with the barrels, levitating them to the side and walked over to where Bestia was. She put a hand on the Red Sith's shoulder in an attempt at reassurance.

"We will find the other Dread Masters. I may not have their locations right now, but I have been gathering allies willing to fight against Arcann. He is the priority right now."

"Thank you. I suppose this could be a start."

I didn't ask to become a Dread Master, Bestia thought. Out of all six of them, maybe only Brontes and Raptus were truly content with the position. Brontes could research ancient artifacts and continue the work of a Sith lord she idolised. Raptus genuinely enjoyed tormenting and breaking others. Bestia supposed that Styrak and Tyrans didn't have much objections to being Dread Masters either. Styrak wasn't exactly concerned with morality, while Tyrans mostly stuck with his sister, and enjoyed the power, and the immortality. That left Bestia herself, and Calphayus, entangled in this mess because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and were in the wrong family. Bestia witnessed the Sith Emperor murder her mother, Ha'nadi, the original Dread Master. Both she and Calphayus were forced to become her replacements, and Bestia was the first Wrath in addition to that. Bestia didn't ask for this power, but she was willing to use it to erase Vitiate from existence. After all, even gods know fear.

And maybe after that, they could have a fresh start. Somewhere away from Oricon. It wasn't her choice to settle there. It was just where her mother stored the Phobis Devices.

"You know, maybe this is destiny. Or maybe it's all bullshit." Bestia shrugged. "The Force is alive and covered in eyes, as Calphayus likes to say. And then he usually offers you tea."

"How charming." Lana said, amused.

"You would get along with him, I think. And maybe with Brontes."

"I will remember that."

"Anyway. Let's head back."

They came back to Koth in charge of a small group of ragged looking humans, one of whom had a campfire going with some pods cooking in a pot. The food problem seemed to solve itself, Bestia thought. Lana wasn't happy.

"Koth, who are these people?"

"Exiles. They were sent here for questioning Arcann's rule. I came across them while collecting the fuel cells that I ejected from the old shuttle."

"Koth this is dangerous. What if they're Arcann's agents?!"

"They're people in need of help. And we need more hands on deck to fix this ship within the next thousand years."

"They have food." Bestia said. "They're already good in my books."

She approached the man cooking. He offered her a bowl of stew. Bestia thanked him and sat down, forcing herself to eat slowly. Lana stomped off, and Koth took two other exiles inside the ship to start on repairs. Bestia saw HK come and go a few times as she ate. She saw Lana emerge, Force levitating a huge clump of plant matter. She still looked unhappy, but seemed resigned. Bestia joined the repairs and cleanup after she finished her meal. The cleaning in particular took a long time, even with two Force users on the job. The pile of discarded plant matter just outside the ship grew, and the amount of living things Bestia had to scare out was ridiculous. She checked in on Koth. It seemed that the box he found earlier was a music player, that he managed to fix, and that now provided him with groovy background beats. He was doing

good in general, making quick work of the ship's essential systems. Maybe it really was destiny, Bestia thought, and Koth had some sort of a special connection to the ship.

"Me and Lana cleaned out most of the overgrowth. How are things here?"

"I'm... done, actually!"

He rose from the floor after putting a panel back into its place, and walked to a large lever.

"Want to do the honors?"

Bestia shrugged, and pulled the lever. To her surprise, lights came on, and a loud humming started in the background. She expected to be zapped by electricity at worst, and for nothing to happen, at best. Koth let out a victorious yell.

"You really did fix it..," She remarked in awe.

Koth's reply was drowned out by an ominous whisper coming from elsewhere on the ship. Bestia froze, her ears twitching, as she sensed an eerie presence though the Force. She gave Koth a nod, and walked off following the trail. It led her to an upper level of the ship, to an area she hadn't seen before. A layer of dust coated everything, undisturbed, but the area was completely free of vegetation that was everywhere else on the ship. It was a round room. A catwalk made a circle around its center, in which sat an enormous structure. It was shaped vaguely like a vertical eye, made of black stone. A series of knobs covered its surface, the only seemingly man-made element of it. A huge round window sat in the midsection of the thing, completing its resemblance to an eye. It was golden, but the inside was completely dark. Looking at it made Bestia uneasy, and she could swear that the darkness trapped inside was swirling. The structure reminded her of the Phobis Devices, pulsing with a similar malicious energy. However, the Phobis Devices were completely artificial. This thing felt alive and full of malice.

A loud boom shook Bestia out of her thoughts. Her holocom came to life, somehow still working despite having been frozen with its owner. She could hear blaster fire on the other end, and Lana calling for assistance. The skytroopers were here.

Bestia sprinted back to the main level, light spear at the ready. Lana followed her outside, while shouting for Koth to get the ship flying. The moment the two stepped outside, they were surrounded by a group of skytroopers. They made quick work of that first wave, but several more came. They were surrounded again, this time by too many. Bestia was exhausted. Lana, however, was calm, her eyes searching the jungle behind the enemy.

Bestia heard it first: a hum of an approaching speeder. She sensed a Force signature as well. She tensed up, expecting another enemy to show up. She saw the stranger circle the droids from behind, too fast to see properly. Something fell to the ground, and then skytroopers started dropping to the ground as well. EMP charges. The stranger then aimed their speeder at the remaining droids, and jumped, doing a backflip and landing gracefully in front of Lana and Bestia while the speeder rammed the enemy and exploded against a nearby cliff wall.

It was an older human woman in armor similar to the Knights Bestia had seen before. She had brown grey-streaked hair in a bun, and odd light blue, almost glowing eyes. Her armor was more elaborate than an average knight's.

"You're late." Lana said, " Bestia, this is Senya. She's an ally."

They didn't have time for better introductions. A shuttle hovered above, spilling out a group of Zakuul knights, and another walker droid. At least those were targets Bestia could use her power against, she thought wearily. All three of them had their hands full fighting the Knights. Senya seemed to be doing the best. Bestia was exhausted and backed into a corner. She saw Lana cornered too, her lightsaber flying from her hand as a knight slashed at her arm. Bestia has had enough then. She took a deep breath, letting her Dread Master powers loose with an inhuman roar. The nearest knights were knocked back, and everyone else in the wake of the blast started running away, bolting into the jungle. They'd be lost to the mire, or to the wildlife, Bestia thought. At least this rid them of the Knights that were attacking Bestia. She didn't risk aiming her blast where it could hit the other two women. She knew Lana could probably withstand it as she had witnessed the Sith stand her ground against Vitiate. Sebya, however, was a mystery, and subjecting a new ally to Force Fear didn't seem like a good move.

The pushback from her body for using the Force was manageable this time, but Bestia was sure she'd regret it later. She started towards Lana as her opponent raised his weapon to strike her down. A shot hit him in the chest, and he dropped. Bestia stopped, watching Koth emerge from the ship.

"Heard a commotion, thought you needed assistance."

"Thank you. We're fine. You should be getting the ship off the ground!"

Koth turned around and disappeared into the ship.

"He won't be able to tear it from the muck," Bestia said.

"Let's give him a hand then."

The three Force users focused on the ship before them, putting all their willpower into raising it up. The ship resisted, but after a few moments the centuries of dirt and vegetation gave way. The ship's engines came to life, burning away vines that had overgrown them. It was lifting off! Bestia felt her insides cramp, but made one last effort to jump into an opening that once was a loading bay. Lana and Senya followed.

They weren't out of the woods yet. Literally, yes. They have cleared the jungle canopy and ascended into the sky. Figuratively, they still had the Eternal Fleet to deal with. The Gravestone rose, ending up face to face with grids upon grids of those arrow-like ships.

"Let's see if this thing really is the ship-killer the legends say it is," Bestia remarked grimly.

She found her way into the control room for the main cannon. The controls were surprisingly familiar. She aimed the thing at the nearest ship, and pressed a button. It was the same as any other gun control on a ship, despite the Gravestone being supposedly alien and ancient in origin.

The cannon came to life, and fired a teal beam at the Eternal Fleet vessel. At first, nothing happened. Then, a moment later, the ship exploded, and teal energy jumped from it to another ship. And another. And more and more until there was a sizable hole in the formation. Blasts still pelted the Gravestone's hull. They had to escape before the old thing fell apart. Bestia sighed with relief when the stars turned into lines and into the blue mist of hyperspace. They were in the clear. She slumped in the chair, closing her eyes and drifting off to a well deserved sleep almost immediately.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: part of this was written as a small fic that expanded upon the spring scene that was one page in the comic. I intended to post it as a separate fic, but now it got absorbed by the rewrite lol.

There are a few differences between the comic and the written version of this chapter because things that worked in the comic didn't work here.

Basically the main difference is that Koth takes the initiative to go and pick up the fuel cells, and rescues the exiles along the way, while Lana and Bestia are looking for water. In the comic, he waits around and Bestia goes with him and is present, but lets him make his own decision with regards to the exiles.

Sanctuary

Chapter Summary

Bestia meets the Scions. The eternal clash of "everything is predetermined and choice is an illusion" and "fuck around and find out".

Chapter Notes

Recommended listening: Cleric Beast's theme from Bloodborne for Bestia vs the Scion fight

Bestia woke up stiff from sleeping in an odd seated position, but she felt slightly rested. She wandered around until she found the bridge. It seemed like she entered moments after an argument had ended, and everyone was staring angrily in different directions. She could feel Koth and Senya's anger in particular. Lana just seemed annoyed.

"Who's funeral is this?"

"Ours if we don't put aside our differences and past grudges and work together." Lana responded.

Koth glared at her angrily.

"It's not a past grudge! She hunted me like an animal!" He jabbed a finger in Senya's direction.

"You deserted!" Senya barked back.

"They ordered us to shoot civilians! Look me in the eye and tell me you would not do the same!"

Great Force. That was a lot. Bestia could sympathize with Koth. But she also saw Lana's point about working together. Senya didn't respond, seemingly taken aback by Koth's words. Bestia looked out of the viewport. They were approaching a planet completely covered in swirling clouds.

"Approaching Asylum." Lana said.

"I should probably figure out how to land this thing." Koth mumbled.

"How are we going to hide the Gravestone? The thing's huge. If that brat has eyes here, they're going to notice."

"This might be the only place free of Arcann's control. It's not on any charts."

"We'll be among friends. Mostly." Koth glared at Senya. Lana turned to the Knight as well.

"Tell your allies we've arrived."

"They already know."

"How, exactly?" Koth drilled.

Senya didn't respond.

"I'm not here to mediate between two adult sentients. I would like to know how they know too."

"The Force." Senya finally answered cryptically.

Bestia exhaled, and rolled her eyes, fighting the urge to just Force Fear the info out of Senya. She turned on her heels and left the bridge to cool off. Not like she had anything else to do until they landed.

When they finally did, Bestia was first out of the ship. It took a few moments for her eyes to adjust. She looked up, blinking. It seemed like the port was inside an eye of a static storm, with huge cloud banks slowly rotating beyond its borders. Sentients and droids scurried here and there. A tower with an observation deck dominated the landscape, likely housing the flight control facilities. Looking back to the ground level, Bestia noticed a group of people approaching, led by a large human.

"Move over!" He yelled, shoving someone out of the way, before stopping in front of Bestia. He was as tall as she was, but slightly bulkier. "Nice ship you got there. We'll be coming on board."

Bestia crossed her arms, not budging.

"And you are...?"

She let the tiniest sliver of her Dread Master power wash over the gathering, causing a few to take a step back. Before the big man could respond, there were hurried footsteps from behind her, and Koth ran up to the man.

"Captain!" The man yelled, clapping Koth on the shoulder. He turned to Bestia, pointing at the rag tag crew. "Outlander! This is my crew."

"I see. Hello there. My name is Bestia. Koth, you could have warned me about them."

"It's more fun that way."

"It would've stopped being fun if I used my power on them."

"Oh, lighten up." Koth seemed unbothered. He turned back to his crew. "Get over here you mangy wooluks!"

Bestia stepped aside, watching the crew go past. Mostly humans, with the exception of one Cathar girl with orange and white fur and a braided ponytail on top of her head. A human straggler stopped before Bestia, looking her up and down. He looked vaguely familiar.

"Yes?"

"Hey. Are you Bestia?"

"Yeah, how did you recognize me?"

"The hair."

That was fair, her hair was pretty unusual: long, bright red, with a single white lock among it. Still, somehow she always thought the Dread Masters were unrecognisable when not wearing their signature masks.

"Anyway, you gave us time to escape back on Marr's ship. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Good to know someone else made it out."

Bestia recognized the voice. Ralo, the Republic officer who was arguing with an imperial on Marr's ship. She smiled and nodded at him. Koth walked up to her.

"Where's Lana?"

"Eh?" Bestia tilted her head. "Didn't see her. Wasn't she inside?"

"No, she's not. My best engineer wandered off and I need help finding her."

"I see. You wanted Lana's help. I could look for your engineer I suppose. What does she look like?"

"Her name is Tora. HK has an image."

Koth disappeared within the ship again. A few moments later, Senya stepped from the shadows. She had clearly waited for Koth to leave before appearing. She handed Bestia a datapad.

"After you're done, meet me at these coordinates. I'll introduce you to my allies."

"It better be worth it. And there better be food. I haven't eaten anything aside from some mushroom stew in five years."

"The Free Zone sells food. Just don't get the gorak."

Bestia nodded, and jogged towards the entrance to the Free Zone. Inside it was a series of hallways and rooms, with people selling all sorts of things from stalls. There was a holonet terminal that caught Bestia's attention. She logged on, and withdrew a few credit chips. Surprisingly, her credit account was intact. She then checked the holonet profiles that she knew Tyrans, her son Mu'hass, and one of the apprentices operated. Those were fairly regular social accounts, but knowing Tyrans, Bestia hoped for some clue about the other Dread Masters' locations. No activity in the last five years aside from a photo of a black sand beach on her son's profile, with no caption. At least he seems to have found a safe spot. Bestia let out a sigh of relief, logged out, cleared her browsing history, and went over to a food stall. While she was eating, HK caught up to her. Apparently Koth had sent him to assist Bestia.

Beyond the bazaar began the truly dangerous areas. A gang of pirates had taken over most of the place, and Bestia had to get through them to find Tora. The danger really sunk in when Bestia spotted a mutilated body in a dark corner. It looked like it was mauled by an animal of some kind. Bestia made a note to watch out for whatever had done this.

She was still exhausted, so she simply let her power go, the pirates and smugglers scurrying in her wake. More walking and a fight with a red zabrak who seemed in charge later, Bestia stood before a hastily built wall. She simply kicked it with Force. A big hole formed in the wall. She and HK stepped in.

"Where's Tora?!" Bestia yelled.

"You could've knocked. My men spent hours building that barricade." A tall Weequay with pinkish grey skin stepped forward. He was wearing dented Republic armor. Bestia leveled him with a stare.

"I wanted to make an entrance."

A scrawny blue haired woman snorted loudly.

"Identification: this is the engineer we are looking for."

"What's she to you?" The Weequay growled.

"The reason I'm here. Let her go, and I will leave you be."

"And who are you to order ME around?"

Bestia let her power loose again, an illusion of a beast wrapping around her.

~~"All your worst fears, rolled into one."~~

The pirate stepped back, suddenly seeing myriads of beastly shadows lurking around him: in corners, behind his people, in the rafters above.

"Alright, alright, you can have her!"

"Good." Bestia let her power fade.

"Where have you been my whole life?" Tora looked scared but grateful.

"Scaring things into having heart attacks. Stabbing what didn't die or surrender. Koth is waiting for you back at the docks."

The engineer ran off.

"Redirection: We should proceed to the rendezvous with Senya, master!"

Bestia found Senya hiding behind a dumpster when she arrived at the coordinates. They stood in a grimy back alley and Bestia could swear she smelled something dead somewhere nearby.

"Right on time. My friends have been waiting."

"So where are they, then?"

"Inside."

Senya stepped up to a wall, and pressed a hidden switch. The wall slid up with a series of clicks and bangs. The two women walked in. HK followed, but as soon as he stepped over the threshold, he collapsed. Bestia glared at Senya.

"You know I don't need the droid to kill you, or anyone else foolish enough to attack me?"

Even in her wounded state, Bestia was sure she could overpower the former Zakuul Knight.

"The droid is not part of what transpires here."

"I don't care. I didn't waste five years of my life because some brat wanted a fancy wall decoration, to waste time on bullshit."

"You may leave whenever you like. But if you want my allies' help, you will stay."

"Fine. But if you, or they, pull anything..."

Bestia let a small sliver of her power loose. Senya winced, but nodded. They moved deeper inside the sanctuary. In contrast to the literal dumpster outside, the Scion hideout was beautiful. Lush blue carpets, carved wooden furnishings that Bestia recognized as Voss-made, or at least copied from Voss designs, and many weapons on display. That latter struck Bestia as odd, and she leaned towards one such display, studying it closer. The weapons were worn, with nicks and dents on them, and under each was a plaque with a name and date.

"This is a memorial..." Bestia muttered.

"Zakuul was once protected by two orders: Knights, and Scions, who see visions of the future and past. After Arcann's rise to power, he ordered Scions banished and exterminated. They no longer serve him."

"No shit. He seemed to really hate the Scions for some reason. I would have left too."

A whining voice rang out through the room. Bestia had heard it before, when led to the throne room five years ago. That old Scion with glowing eyes. Heskai, was it?

"Fate is a tale whispered to us by the Force. But the voices are silent about you."

Bestia pondered her response. She still was on the fence about the concept of fate. She deferred to and respected her father's visions, but still preferred to not think about fate too much. Even Calphayus agreed that the future was always in motion, each tiny action or lack of action branched out into infinite possibilities.

“My father is a seer. He had a vision about me, but it was impossible for him to see past a certain point as well.”

“If we are to aid you we must understand the role you play in Arcann’s downfall.”

“My role is to knock him down. He wasted five years of my life.”

“We will test you both physically and spiritually, to see the truth!”

Bestia shrugged. She wasn't given much of a choice other than to go with the Scions' tests. A thought entered her mind.

“Say. Heskai, was it? I was told that you’re a great healer. And I happen to be in need of such aid. How about a deal: I complete your tests, and you heal me. It would be a shame if my future was cut short by the results of a shitty carbonite job, wouldn't it?”

“So be it. I will heal you, should you complete the trials.” Heskai answered solemnly.

“I tie my fate to yours in these trials. Come what may.” Senya said.

Bestia chuckled to herself. “Come what may” was just a fancy way to say “Fuck around and find out.” An antithesis to the concept of predetermined fate. And the way Bestia personally preferred it. It made life more exciting, especially after living for almost a thousand years. Two scions stepped out of the shadows, a man and a woman. The man was tall with tan skin and light hair, while the woman was pale and had red slicked back hair.

“The Heart of Scyva is heavy with loss. In her pain, we lash out.” The tall man’s voice had a similar sorrowful quality to Heskai’s.

“Please, defend yourselves.” Said the woman, readying her lightsaber. Pink. Not the most threatening color, but the Scions wielded it well.

Bestia readied her lightspear in return. Out of respect, she decided to fight on the same level as the Scions and hold her power back. Between her and Senya, they defeated the two Scions

easily, and made their way deeper into the hideout. There were more of those memorial weapon displays. Each weapon once belonged to a Scion.

They entered another large room, the site of the next trial, Bestia guessed. They waited, but nothing happened. Bestia plopped down on the nearest couch. Might as well wait in comfort.

“We’re ready for the next test. Any time.”

“Overconfidence. Hunger. Still, you are more patient here than in the Free Zone. Don’t think we are not aware of your power. Yet, you left no bodies in your wake.”

“You were watching me.”

“We are always watching. Arcann took years of your life but he stole much more from us.”

“I hear you. I’ve seen all the weapons and names.”

“Do you feel anything for those who suffered while you slept?”

“I cannot speak for strangers, but Arcann has displaced my family and destroyed my home. My vengeance is my own, but that brat will get what’s coming for him.”

Senya frowned at that.

“And what of you Senya? What do you feel?”

“Shame. I was in no position to protect our Emperor.”

“And what of the Scions slaughtered because Arcann demanded it?”

“Yeah, why does he hate the Scions so much?”

“He thinks himself above fate.”

“When I joined the Knights they were a shield that protected Zakuul. Now they are a weapon wielded by a petulant child!”

“Then they’ll fall.” Bestia stated coldly.

“You’d destroy an order that stood for almost a thousand years?”

“I’ve been alive for almost a thousand years. You’ll build a new, better order eventually.”

Two more Scions appeared, this time jumping from somewhere above. Again, a man and a woman.

“The eyes of Esne claim what can never be hers,” Said the woman.

“They speak of envy.” Senya explained.

“We take no pleasure from this trial, but we do what we must. Be strong, Outlander!”

These Scions sounded more and more like self-sacrificial sticks in the mud. Bestia couldn't help but pity them. The archetypal tragic prophets, shunned for their prophecies.

After they dealt with the second challenge, Senya and Bestia made their way into a large circular chamber. This was the largest room so far, nested on the top level of the hideout. An intricate circular star pattern decorated the floor, echoed in the window in the ceiling, the only bright source of light. Columns and statues flanked the walls. A ghostly illusion of Zakuul's new emperor hovered in the middle of the room.

“You seek to remove Arcann from the throne. As well you should. His destiny is to fall. We have foreseen as much. But his final fate is unclear. When he's at your mercy, what will you do?”

Bestia thought about it for a moment.

“I don't know. As I am right now, I want to rip him limb from limb. He deserves a punishment. How cruel or fatal it will be, I'll decide when the time comes.”

“Arcann will face justice for the lives he has taken.” Senya said.

“A thousand Scions lay dead because of him.” Heskai cried. Then another voice cut in, quiet and raspy.

“Blood calls out for blood.”

“Do you agree? Answer us! If you are not with us, you stand against the tides of fate! Arcann and Vaylin must die!” Heskai cried out.

A zealot consumed with vengeance. Some part of Bestia could relate to his rage. She felt the same towards Vitiate. Arcann was just an annoying obstacle in the way, and if he refused to move, Bestia was more than willing to reduce him to a pile of charred flesh chunks. And of this zealot assisted her in removing that obstacle, all the better.

"Maybe you're right." She said, carefully.

Figures jumped down from the darkness above. Bestia recognized Heskai and the skull mask Scion. Skull Mask seemed to be even more hunched, and there was something bestial about their movements now. The Scions they fought before were there too, spreading in a wide circle around the room. Heskai stepped forward, but his companion stopped him.

"Allow me to fight her. Maybe the blood will reveal her future to me as it did our Emperor's."

Heskai nodded and stepped back.

"Very well, Shyren. Learn their fate."

"I will. Even if I have to tear them open."

Shyren took off their own skull mask, revealing a pale face and purple hair. They only had one red eye, the other an empty socket in a mess of deep scars running down the side of their face. They smiled, teeth too sharp for a human. Something was off about them in general: the hunched posture, the too long arms.

They took a vibroblade out of its scabbard on their hip, bowed respectfully, and charged. Bestia didn't expect them to move so quickly, and neither did Senya. The Scion dashed towards her, and then vanished in a blur of shadows, appearing behind her and striking her on the head. Just like that, Senya was out. Bestia had to be careful with that one. The Scion turned their attention to Bestia, dissolving into the shadows once more. Bestia jumped back, to a wall, and raised her spear just in time to parry.

Shyren stumbled back momentarily, and growled. Their arms started to change, nails turning into hooked talons, and dark fur spreading over what skin was visible. Bestia wondered if they were partly some sort of shapeshifting alien, although with the Zakuul population seemingly being exclusively human, it was unlikely. The transformation echoed through the Force the way a biological event wouldn't. Bestia would think about it later, when those claws didn't threaten to

flay her alive. Shyren's speed and ferocity were impressive, even to Bestia, who had fought all manner of sentients and beasts during her life.

The Scion vanished again, seemingly using the shadow melding trick again. Bestia's eyes scanned the room, spear raised defensively. They seemed to rely on surprise too much, she thought. Still, she was caught off guard when claws raked across her shoulder from above. She snarled, and jumped back. The Scion used the shadows to drop from above! That was clever, Bestia had to give them that. Maybe it was time to stop holding back. She growled, and blasted the Scion with her Force Fear before they could dodge. They were stunned, one clawed hand holding their head, the other on the ready to attack whatever they were seeing. Bestia lunged at them, and tackled them to the floor, pointing the tip of the lightsaber spear at their already mangled-looking throat.

"I win." She declared.

"Don't kill them. We need the Scions." Senya was awake. The Scions who had been watching from the edges of the room crowded around Shyren, lightsabers drawn.

"The blood of Tyth flows through you. Don't force us to spill it." Now that the tall Scion stood next to Heskai, Bestia wondered if they were related.

Bestia stepped away. "I'm not going to kill them. If anything, I'm impressed."

Shyren sat up, their arms slowly changing back to human although the claws seemed to stay. They licked the blood from their claws. Their body stiffened and their one eye glowed red.

"Stand down, now!" A threatening voice called from behind Bestia. She turned to see Lana and Koth standing there with their weapons drawn.

"It's fine. I'm fine."

Heskai stepped in front of his fellow Scions, looking at Shyren with concern. They still were in the grip of their vision.

"We made a deal. You've completed our trials. In return, I will heal you."

He raised his arms towards Bestia, his eyes glowing silver. A wave of cool energy washed over Bestia's body, immediately closing the claw marks Shyren had left. More importantly, she felt the pain lift from her insides, and the sense of wrongness was gone. She sighed, and rolled her shoulders.

"Much appreciated."

"The Scions will come to your aid." Heskai started.

"The spawn of Zildrog will fall by your hand, Chosen of Tyth." Shyren suddenly announced. Everyone turned to stare at them as they slowly got up, leaning into Heskai.

Bestia blinked. "What?"

"I had a vision. You will slay the spawn of Zildrog."

"What's a spawn of Zildrog? And what about Arcann?"

Shyren shrugged. "His fate is inconsequential. It hangs in balance between you, myself..." they pointed a claw at Senya. "...And his **mother**."

The room went silent. Everyone stared at Senya who in return, glared at Shyren. Bestia could sense another Koth and Senya fight brewing on the horizon.

"I was going to bring that up. Yes, Vaylin and Arcann are my children. No, this doesn't change anything. They still must be stopped."

"You do realise that you might end up losing them permanently," Bestia said.

Senya didn't reply. The walk back to the ship was about the most awkward experience Bestia has been present for in the last few hundred years. At least they had made a tentative ally in the Scions.

Lady of Sorrows

Chapter Summary

Bestia returns to Zakuul, and makes a surprising but welcome discovery.

Zakuul, several days later, near nightfall. A small shuttle hovered in front of a huge sewer drain in the Spire's wall, the jungle below full of wildlife noises. Bestia and Senya jumped out of the shuttle and onto the grating. Bestia was wrapped in a hooded jacket instead of her upper robe. She hoped it would be enough to blend her in. Bestia was still sure that Lana should have gone instead, being a human and not a six feet tall bright orange alien with big buff arms who stood out like a sore thumb among humans. Lana was convinced it had to be Bestia though, so off she and Senya went. Senya hummed a small part of a song as she walked inside the tunnel. Much to Bestia's surprise, there wasn't much of a stench like she expected. She thanked her luck, the Force, and the fact that Zakuul cared enough for the environment outside its cities to filter the water.

"We're in the middle of the enemy's territory, and you're singing?"

"What is a better place?"

Bestia had no witty answer to that. It was weird to be back on Zakuul, under the enemy's nose, but they had an information broker to bring into Lana's budding alliance. One by the pretentious name "Lady of Sorrows". Bestia huffed. Damn Zakuulans and their damn theatrics.

"That beast Scion called me a chosen of Tyth. What does it mean?"

"According to the Old Ways, Tyth was a god of fire and battles, a protector. I suppose they saw those traits in you. They also referred to a quirk of Zakuul's. Occasionally people would have traits associated with the Old Gods. They are the Chosen. I think Shyren may be a Chosen of Nahut."

"Is this why they're part beast?"

"Could be. I'm afraid my knowledge is limited. Study of the Old ways is frowned upon unless you're a Scion."

"I see..."

An awkward silence. Bestia finally decided to address the bantha in the room.

"So. Arcann is your son. Does it mean you're an Empress or something?"

Senya sighed and shook her head.

"It was more complicated than that. Valkorion and I never married openly. For whatever reason, he didn't want an official consort. Or he didn't care for the customs of us mere mortals."

"Speaking of Valkorion, there's something you need to know about him. I met him once, long before. I was imprisoned by an entity named Vitiate, the one I was trying to chase down when Arcann captured me. Valkorion was in a cell next to mine, and I think Vitiate was trying to break him into a vessel to possess. That's kind of his thing. He's so powerful in the Force that he has to switch bodies as they get degraded."

Senya listened quietly. It was a lot to take in, the revelation that the man she fell in love with might have been but an empty husk possessed by another. Bestia continued her story.

"I guess Valkorion was special to Vitiate somehow, to be intact after so long. I wonder if you actually got the real Valkorion, or Vitiate pretending to do human interaction. I wonder if there's anything left of the poor bastard."

Senya fell silent, disturbed by the revelation. She combed through the memories of her relationship with the late Emperor. The discrepancies that she chalked up to him being an immortal being worshipped like a god and having outdated mannerisms. How distant he became once he seemingly got bored of her. The glimpses of darkness behind his eyes. What did it mean for her, and more importantly, what did it mean for her children? Did they carry the same darkness in them? It would explain Vaylin's raw power in the Force, at least.

"You... may be right. If that Vitiate truly hollowed him out, I doubt there is anything left."

Senya trailed off, and Bestia followed her to a locked hatch. Senya started looking for something, a hidden switch, when the door suddenly opened, revealing a familiar silver and blue astromech. T7 beeped happily at the two women.

"Hello little one." Senya smiled at the droid. "That is an interesting paint job."

"Hey T7. You sure do get around." Bestia greeted.

"Dread Master + Knight = have no idea."

"We should swap stories sometime." Senya said.

The droid followed them.

"T7 used to belong to my daughter. She painted the flames." Bestia said.

She was still processing the revelation from the Scion hideout. It threw a wrench into her intent to slaughter Arcann. Bestia didn't really want Senya to go through the same anguish as she did, but deep down knew that there might not be another choice. At least Arcann's behaviour up to this point indicated that. Even if Arcann came back as an Undying, she still wouldn't wish it on Senya. Sharack didn't even look at her in the throne room. Bestia questioned whether Sharack even recognized her, and if there was anything left of the person the Jedi once was. Styrak didn't change much, other than the trauma he suffered from ever since. Sharack however seemed far more different, both physically and mentally, laser focused on destroying Vitiate.

"She died fighting Vitiate. And then came back as this undying being that I'm not even sure recognizes me anymore."

"I am truly sorry. Arcann had a twin brother, Thexan. I don't know what happened, but one day I saw the funeral over the Holonet. Wasn't even allowed to attend myself."

"I am sorry as well. I hate to say it, but might as well get it out in the clear. Arcann may die as well. The revelation from before made me reconsider killing him, but I will do what I have to if I'm not left with any other choice."

"Won't we all?" Senya asked, her voice tired and broken.

Well. At least Senya didn't attack her on the spot. Bestia doubted their alliance would last if she were to kill Arcann but for now they had an understanding. She'd cross that bridge when she got to it. They kept walking through the sewers in silence, past the uncaring custodian droids and through a few skirmishes with wildlife, until they made it out into an abandoned railway tunnel. From there, it was a short trip onto the surface. They now stood in a dimly lit and more seedy version of the upper city. Same architecture, but worn down and covered in grime.

"So, what are we looking for?"

"Knights tried to apprehend the Lady of Sorrows many times, and failed. However, I have a feeling we may succeed this time. I have a contact nearby. You and the droid should keep a low profile, but if you come across any clues, let me know."

Bestia nodded, pulling her hood a little farther over her head. Senya's reply explained nothing once again, something that seemed to be a pattern with her. Bestia questioned Lana's choice to send her to Zakuul again, but the jacket hid her appearance well enough to not raise that much suspicion at first glance. Out of ideas, she decided to wander around and listen. Maybe she'd learn something useful from a conversation. T7 meanwhile plugged into holonet outlets, monitoring transmissions with the same goal. Apparently Zakuul's computers were snobby.

Most of the conversations Bestia ended up eavesdropping on were fairly useless. A girl excitedly talked about how the Lady of Sorrows had a crown and could do sick backflips. Her companion was skeptical and of the opinion she watched too much Holotube. A man selling hats complained about some cult of Zildrog being obsessed with the end times. Bestia made a mental note to ask Senya about Zildrog as it wasn't the first time she's heard the name lately.

Suddenly, Bestia felt a familiar pull on the Force bond that connected her to the other Dread Masters. She reached out towards the source of the pull, and recognized it. Could it be? Styrak, here on Zakuul? The pull faded before Bestia could determine its location.

Bestia was so lost in thought that she didn't notice the scantily clad woman walking fast towards her. The girl crashed into the wall that was Bestia, and fell on her butt, staring up at Bestia with her mouth agape. Oh shit, Bestia thought, she could see Bestia's face under the hood. The Zakuulan hastily scrambled to her feet and ran off. Bestia was worried that the girl would do something, report her to someone, but chasing her down would have drawn even more attention. She had a holocall to answer anyway. It was Senya.

"Meet me in the cantina. I have some "friends" I need assistance with."

The image of Senya ducked as something flew past her head.

"Coming. Leave some fun for me."

A cantina fight wasn't Bestia's idea of laying low, but it seemed like Senya really needed help. The Dread Master hurried towards the coordinates. She found Senya in the bar, surrounded by several people dressed in identical black trench coats and masks. One of them was wielding an acid green lightsaber, while the rest had blasters. A few onlookers gawked from the corners, heedless of the danger. Bestia barreled into the nearest foe, picking him up and throwing him at the others. She kept her Dread Master power in check for now. It was too risky and could blow her cover. While Senya was engaged with the Force user, Bestia quickly dispatched the blaster wielders. Even without her powers, they weren't keen on fighting her after seeing her throw one of them across the room and spotting the lightspear hanging from her back. She joined Senya and together they overpowered the Force user. While Senya fought him, Bestia impaled him with her lightsaber. The fight was over.

Cantina patrons crawled out from various hiding spots and from behind overturned tables, and started clapping and cheering. Bestia snarled at them. Didn't they have anything better to do? She saw someone whip out a holorecorder and flipped off the camera. Meanwhile Senya stomped over to the bar and dragged a struggling man from behind it.

"You sent the heralds after me. Foolish move, Reg." She growled at the man.

"It wasn't me! Heralds of Zildrog are in charge of the Old World now! They made a deal with Arcann!"

"A deal?"

"Heralds deal with the crime, the Knights stay out."

"Tell me where we can find the Lady of Sorrows."

"Are you crazy? She's even more dangerous than the heralds!"

Senya punched him.

"She's the nice one here. I think." Bestia said, her arms crossed, and her back to the crowd.

"Fine. I was gonna warn you to not mess with her but hey, your funeral! I don't know where the Lady is, but I know someone who works with her all the time. Mona Gale, she's an information broker at Market Station."

"Who are the Heralds?" Bestia asked as she and Senya made their way towards their new contact's location.

"Cultists worshipping Zildrog, they believe in the end of the world."

"So Zildrog is basically the evil god?"

"Sort of. None of the Old Gods are particularly kind. Some believe Zildrog is an aspect of Izax, the Great Dragon. I don't think so. Izax is benevolent to those who earn it. Zildrog is just pure malice and wants nothing more than to devour the world."

"Devour, huh? Shyren mentioned a "Spawn of Zildrog" and that I would defeat it. I wonder if they were referring to Vitiate..."

Market station was a decommissioned train station that hosted a series of shops inside the cabins of an abandoned train, and among them, was an information broker. They just had to find her among all the tacky neon signs that promised roast Gorak and improvements in lightsaber size. A dark-skinned woman with red braided hair stood behind a counter in one of the cabins they entered. A small inconspicuous sign was above the counter. Bestia and Senya arrived as a man was ranting about his bad luck in betting on arena fights. Senya scowled at that. This seemed to be the place.

"Those arena fights are brutal. I'd shut them down if I could."

"I don't know, they sound fun. I'd participate as a combatant if I could."

Senya shook her head, but chose to turn her ire onto the information seller.

"Scamming people is illegal."

"He lost his bet fair and square. Also, Knights have no authority here."

"I don't care. Lady of Sorrows, where is she?"

Mona rolled her eyes.

"If I knew where to find her, I sure wouldn't give it up to a Knight and whatever in Zildrog's scaly ass your companion is."

Suddenly a shrill sound came from the outside, and everyone's attention was drawn to a huge holo display that a moment ago was streaming an arena fight. Now, there was a rotating holo of Bestia, followed by that of Senya. The two images alternated, as the emperor announced the two's crimes, half of which was a lie, and the other was exaggerated.

"Ah shit here we go again..." Bestia muttered under her breath, pulling at her hood. It had to be that skimpy girl that bumped into her earlier. She had probably managed to take a good look at Bestia's face, and recognized her from a previous holo or wanted poster. She noticed Mona shift her eyes from the holo to Bestia and Senya, then back to the holo, then back at them, an expression of alarm spreading across her face. Senya leaned onto the counter threateningly.

"Between the two of us, I'm actually the nice one." Bestia said. "So cough it up."

"I would. Except I can't. I don't even know how to reach her, she always contacts me first. But, I know that she meets with the leader of the Heralds of Zildrog down in The Breaktown. They have some sort of a truce."

"Thank you," Bestia said.

"For sending you to Breaktown? Sure."

With information in hand, Senya led Bestia to the train platform that would take them to their destination: Breaktown. Breaktown was the ground level of the spire, a forgotten and destitute area where people ended up when there was nowhere else left to fall. It was dark, what little light that filtered from above and street lights were mostly broken, casting everything in a sickly green light. As Senya grimly explained, Breaktown wasn't always a horrible place. It used to be an area of the spire similar to the Old World: not as affluent and modern as the upper levels, but safe to live in. It started to decline during the last years of Valkorion's life. The emperor had seemingly let it fall through the cracks, too preoccupied with something else. Or, Bestia thought, Vitiate was too busy jumping between at least two other bodies, and then having the crap beat out of him by the Jedi hero. Breaktown's decline became complete during Arcann's reign, with Heralds of Zildrog taking over.

"So your kid let a doomsday cult run a large area of the city? Man, what could have gone right?"

Senya just kept walking with determination in her step. Speeders zipped above.

"I know where the Heralds are holed up but they won't give up information easily. They have new leadership they believe to be the avatar of Zildrog."

"Can we offer them anything?"

"Short of bringing Zildrog back? No."

"I could use my power on them. Fear tends to make people talk."

They had to fight through many Heralds on the way to their hideout. Bestia noticed that the Force users among them favored the Dark Side as opposed to being neutral like the Knights and the Scions. Finally, they stood before a gate, and behind it was a courtyard patrolled by more Heralds.

"About time you got here!" a voice came from the darkness.

"Koth?" Bestia asked, surprised.

"T7 told me you were heading here."

"What are you doing here?!" Senya demanded

"I have my ways. Let's be real: Heralds hate Knights. And honestly I don't blame 'em."

It seemed being awfully cryptic was just a Zakuul thing.

"No offence but this job requires a local. A regular person, not a Knight. Heralds won't speak to you if you show up with a Knight by your side."

"I'll make them talk." Senya protested.

"No you won't. Look. I'm a regular person. I speak their language. I grew up here!"

Bestia looked at the two of them, weighing her options. With most of her wounds healed, she didn't need Force user backup, and Koth made a compelling point.

"I will go with Koth. Senya, stay in contact. We might need you in there."

Senya glared at Koth and Bestia as the two made their way through the gate. Bestia suddenly felt a familiar presence again, and the source seemed to be ahead. The Heralds' hideout was in an abandoned tower. The walls were covered in glowing graffiti and red banners with a serpent's head on them. Litter covered the ground, Bestia had to step over shards of glass and other debris. There were even spots where plant life had started to take over. Koth shook his head as they made their way through.

"This place is called The Razor. Once was THE place to be." He shook his head again. "Zakuul is supposed to be better."

Bestia nodded. "I would have loved to visit here during a more peaceful time. From what little I've seen, Zakuul is a beautiful world."

They noticed a sudden lack of resistance from the Heralds. Instead, the cultists scurried and stepped aside. Bestia stared at them in apprehension and surprise. Why the sudden change of heart?

She would receive her answer when she and Koth finally made it into the main room. A large group of heralds flanked a carpeted pathway that led to a huge shrine decorated with bones and serpent effigies. In front of the shrine was a throne, and next to it stood two figures: one extremely tall, and one extremely short. Both were wearing the black trench coats of the Heralds, altho the short one also had a cape made to look like feathered wings. The cultists let Bestia and Koth pass, and the two figures turned around to face her, and her eyes went wide.

Before her, in charge of the cult, stood Styrak and Rammas. Styrak was, for once, not wearing his mask, revealing a purple skinned Pureblood with black hair. A huge burn scar claimed half his face, the eye on that side droopy and clouded over. His other eye was red on black. Dark veins of corruption radiated from around it. He stood leaning on a cane with a skull on its top. Rammas shared his species, but had dark orange skin, and even darker black hair with a white forelock. She was really short and skinny. A gnarled scar ran from one side of her face and along her mouth, giving her a bit of a half smile. One of her jaw spikes was missing. Her eyes were odd for her species: black with red horizontal pupils.

Rammas waved at Bestia, grinning. Her teeth were pointy. Expensive looking jewelry decorated her fingers and neck. Styrak descended from the shrine and limped towards Bestia. She ran the rest of the distance and wrapped her husband up in a rib-crushing hug that shifted into a more tender embrace. The cultists stared impassively, their expressions hidden behind their masks.

"What are you doing here?" Bestia asked. "How?.."

"Oricon got attacked by some kind of fleet soon after you left." Rammas started. "Everyone ran away. I went with Lord Styrak. Mu'hass was with us too but we split up. We ended up here and these guys think I'm the avatar of their god, and Lord Styrak is his paragon or something. The guy previously in charge of this cell stood no chance. Now I get free shoulder rides from the tall cultists and nice food, and all this jewelry too."

"How long have you been here?" Bestia still had her arms around Styrak's midsection, and Styrak was content to let Rammas explain.

"Eh like... a year? Year and a half? I don't really know." Rammas shrugged.

"So you guys know each other?" Koth asked, eyeing the two cautiously.

"That's my husband, Styrak, and one of my apprentices, Rammas. This is Koth, he is a friend."

Rammas waved at Koth, and Styrak simply nodded.

"Nice to meet you." Koth didn't sound so sure. "So uh, about our business here. You don't happen to know an individual who goes by Lady of Sorrows?"

"Yea we work with her sometimes." Rammas replied. "She's here actually, and wants to meet you. Follow me."

She moved around the shrine, towards an elevator door. Bestia, Styrak, and Koth followed.

"I sensed your presence when I arrived here. Do you know where the others are?"

"Calphayus is with Mu'hass, Rammas keeps in contact with Tyrans and Brontes, and none of us have any idea where Raptus is." Styrak replied, side-eyeing Koth. "I know where Calphayus is, but I'd rather that stayed between the two of us."

"So Oricon is really gone?"

Styrak nodded, a tiny shudder running through his body at the memory.

"How do you know?"

"I was frozen in carbonite for the last five years, and I had dreams in the meantime. I saw what happened on Oricon. And I saw Raptus pledging loyalty to the guy in charge of the fleet, or at least pretending to."

"That would explain why we couldn't sense you."

"I tried to reach out shortly after being freed but either the freezing messed with the connection or everyone was actively hiding their presence."

Styrak nodded.

"Tyrans thinks he sensed you on Oricon when the fleet attacked," Rammas piped up.

"Huh." It matched yet another scene in Bestia's dream.

The elevator stopped at what probably was the top level of the tower. The doors opened, releasing everyone into a large, surprisingly clean room. In contrast to the rest of the hideout, it was well lit, both from the lights inside and from the daylight streaming from the windows. Bestia saw Senya huddled in the middle, looking dazed, but alert. Behind her paced a droid, shaped like a humanoid woman with a small halo around the top of her head.

"I've never had anyone sneak up on me like that." Senya announced. There was fear in her eyes. "I'm lucky she doesn't want me dead. I told the Lady about the Gravestone."

Koth bristled, but said nothing.

"Can we trust her?" It was unclear if he meant Senya or the Lady.

Bestia shrugged. "Let's find out."

She turned to the droid. "So, you're the Lady of Sorrows."

"And you are one of the Dread Masters. My associates have informed me about you." She nodded to Styrak and Rammas.

"You're a droid." Bestia said bluntly. Rammas winced.

"Don't call her that, she gets pissed."

"I am no droid, Dread Master." The Lady of Sorrows said haughtily. "I am an intelligence beyond comprehension. You may call me Scorpio. I have come to Zakuul for further self-improvement. The proposal put forward by your associates intrigued me enough that I decided to accompany you."

So the Lady of Sorrows wasn't a pretentious Zakuulan after all, but instead, a pretentious droid. Throughout Scorpio's little speech, Bestia felt like she was talked down to. She could understand the words said but together they didn't make sense to her. Brontes, however, would have had a field day here. Scorpio turned her attention to Styrak and Rammas.

"You can run the Heralds as you wish. Destroy them if you need to."

"I will come too." Styrak said.

"I think I can command this cell via Holonet." Rammas shrugged, as if running a doomsday cult was a completely normal everyday thing to her. "Free cult, anyone?"

The whole group left the abandoned skyscraper. Styrak immediately took position by Bestia's side like he always did if they were out together. A spot of familiarity among the turbulent events of the past days. She took his hand reassuringly, feeling the Force Bond between them re-establish itself.

"You look really good in this coat." Bestia said, looking him over. The shiny black coat was flattering on Styrak's body.

"Thank you," He replied. "I think I like it too."

Styrak spent the whole trip back to Asylum conducting rituals to heal the remaining damage from the freezing. Rammas was occupied with sending out messages on her datapad, additional orders for the Heralds cell she accidentally ended up in charge of. While Styrak

channeled the Force into her, Bestia recounted everything that happened from the moment she left to the moment they were reunited. Styrak was surprised at how well Heskai had done. Between Heskai's healing and his own, Bestia was once again healthy and able to exert her full power. In turn, Bestia was happy to have at least a fraction of her family back, with a bonus of another group of zealots in addition to the Scions.

Chapter end notes:

Birds flipped: 5

Road to Odessen

Chapter Summary

The Asylum is under attack! Bestia and her allies scramble to free the Gravestone from the dock and escape.

There was yet another argument brewing on the bridge of the Gravestone. This time it was between Tora, who was trying to fix the ship's hyperdrive, Koth, who just got zapped by electricity, and Scorpio, who deemed the two organics utterly incompetent. Senya, Styrak, and Rammas seemed to have vacated the premises beforehand. Bestia regretted not following their example.

"You are doing this ship a disservice with your primitive appendages. Give me full access to the ship, and I will enhance its parameters. The current recommended updates list is over ten thousand items long."

"Eh, I'm not against Scorpio helping with updates. She seems to know what she's doing," Bestia shrugged.

Despite her long life and experience, technical stuff usually went over her head. The word "updates" struck a level of fear into her on par with the Phobis Devices. The list of updates that she put off on her datapad was probably about as long as the one Scorpio proposed for the Gravestone.

"Well, I am!" Koth yelled, then turned to glare at Scorpio. "Keep your metal mitts away from my ship!"

Bestia let out a tired sigh. She was starting to understand Styra's misanthropy, although his aversion to sentient company was mostly informed by the fact that big crowds and even one on one conversation were overwhelming for him a lot of the time. Bestia was one of the few people who weren't draining for Styra to be around.

"Let her at least look at the hyperdrive. We'll need the hyperdrive fixed to leave." She pinched the bridge of her nose. Scorpio conceded.

"Acceptable. For now."

Scorpio moved towards the control panel and Koth begrudgingly gave up his position.

"Ugh." Bestia groaned, making her way out. Lana followed her.

"Let's give them space. The bridge can only hold so many personalities at once."

"Tell me about it. I had to learn to coexist with five personalities for centuries. I think I need some air."

"Thoughts on Scorpio?"

"Smug. Kinda reminds me of Brontes in a way. I would let her work on the ship, because she seems to know what she's doing, but I would also keep an eye on her."

Lana nodded as the two walked along a corridor. The sounds of people bickering faded away and Bestia let out a sigh of relief.

"I have some good news. Contacts have reached out to me, people from both the Republic and the Empire. They are willing to form an alliance against the Eternal Throne."

"That's... good? I suppose? I don't see how it gets me closer to my initial goal of defeating Vitiate though."

"Arcann and his fleet are a slightly more immediate threat right now."

"Yeah, I guess so. Odd to see the Empire and the Republic talking. Let's hope they won't do a one-eighty when they see me. Otherwise I'm willing to cooperate to get Arcann out of my way."

Bestia's holocom beeped, startling her. She lifted the device up, grumbling, and an image of Heskall appeared. He looked off somehow. Bestia swore she saw fear behind his eyes. The tone of his voice was strained

"Your presence is required. Come alone."

"Sure. I'll be there."

The holocall ended and Bestia regarded the holocom skeptically before snorting.

"Come alone, my ass. Fat chance."

"Be careful. The Scions are zealots. They can be unpredictable."

"Ironic, considering their whole "bend over for destiny" shtick. Anyway, something feels off. I'll be taking Styrak with me. I think he needs time away from the ship too."

"Sound strategy. I think he and Rammas were in that room with the odd obelisk on the upper level."

Bestia nodded, and headed off.

Back at the Scion hideout, one Scion wasn't having a peaceful night. A vision struck Shyren at an early hour. They saw Heskall screaming in pain. Red strings were tied around Heskall's limbs, and someone Shyren couldn't see was pulling on them forcing him to stab one of the Scions.

Others lay dead at his feet, killed by his hand against his will. They saw themselves, completely lost to their curse as they had nothing left to exist for. Next flash showed Shyren their own dead body in some grimy alley. The vision ended, leaving the Scion gasping and wheezing, anxiety tearing into their guts with painful cramps. Panicking, they snuck out of their room and woke up the rest of the Scions, except Heskai. They would tell him later. The Scions gathered in one of the larger rooms, grumpy and tired.

"Shyren, what in the name of Izax is this?"

"I had a vision. Someone will come and force Heskai to kill everyone, or do it themselves. You all need to run, or you'll die!" Shyren rasped, shaking the nearest Scion, Marai by the shoulders.

The gathered Scions exchanged looks and murmured between themselves, uncertainty and fear in their voices. Some grew angry at what for all intents and purposes was a betrayal by the man they all looked up to.

"We are but leaves on the river of fate," Marai proclaimed solemnly. Shyren shook him again, growling.

"You really are Heskai's brother aren't you? Same sad tragic sacrificial lamb bullshit."

Heskai always had this tragic aura about him. He was completely resigned to whatever fate his visions showed him. It didn't sit well with Shyren, because the visions would only show one timeline. What if something knocked things off course between the point when the vision happened and the point shown in it? What then? Heskai never had the answer to that. The poor self-sacrificial bastard.

Shyren was well aware that they probably came off as the same brand of self-sacrificing and stubborn for choosing to be loyal to him, but it still was their choice. They could have distanced themselves from the man if they wanted. But they stayed, because they wanted to protect him. Like he protected them. If not for the Scions, Shyren would have probably been in prison or exiled. They wanted to return the favour and ensure Heskai would see a happier future one day. So they both would. Shyren didn't want to see a future without Heskai, or the other Scions.

"If it's our fate to die now, then so be it." Marai said.

"WELL FUCK FATE THEN!" Shyren snarled at him, spit flying from their mouth. They wiped it with their arm.

Several Scions gasped. Such blatant disregard of their creed! Shyren always did struggle with the concept of giving oneself over to fate completely, but maybe, this time, it would save them all.

"When will it happen?" One of the Scions, Oramis, asked. Her voice was calm in comparison.

"Soon. Really soon."

Oramis nodded. She also didn't quite agree with Heskai's fanatical self-sacrifice, and the two butted heads a lot. And as much as Shyren loved Heskai, they usually found themselves agreeing with Oramis. Binding oneself to one destiny when the future was always in motion seemed, ironically, blind. She was also Heskai's second in command, so if Shyren could convince her to leave, the other Scions would follow.

"Please," Shyren begged. "You are my friends and I don't want you to die because one man had the wrong vision."

"They are right. We have already lost enough. If nothing happens, we can return here. If Arcann does come after us, then Shyren's vision helps us to avoid more death." She finally said.

And the rest of the Scions deferred to her. Some grumbled, but morning would find the hideout almost abandoned as the Scions slipped away. The last group were the ones most loyal to Heskai, but even they were about to leave. Tersu, a red-headed girl, and one of Shyren's friends, turned around at the exit.

"You're not coming, are you?"

Shyren shook their head.

"I need to look after Heskai."

"Why, he's basically about to betray us?"

"He believes he has to do it. Maybe I can convince him he doesn't. I don't want to lose him."

"You both are stubborn self-sacrificing bastards. Don't die on us, will you?"

"I'll try," Shyren gave her a crooked grin.

The premonition grew only stronger. It would come to pass soon, Shyren knew it. They waved at the leaving Scions, and headed back to their room. Heskai won't be happy to find the hideout abandoned, but he would have to live with it. He wasn't the only one receiving visions after all. At least the other Scions would be safe. Unable to sleep, Shyren made their way into the meditation hall upstairs.

Bestia and StyraK entered the Scion hideout and immediately felt something was off. It was far too quiet. Where was Heskai if he was so eager to meet with Bestia again? The hideout seemed entirely abandoned. Were the Scions doing another trial by ambush? Bestia reached out with the Force amplifying her senses, but felt nothing, until a tangle of negative emotions grabbed her attention from above.

"Something is going on in their main room, I can sense it."

"Let's go then."

They rushed into the round chamber to see Arcann locked in combat with a beast cloaked in shadows, and struggling against their relentless assault. The Chosen of Nahut was screeching, seemingly lost to the beast, and slashing at Arcann with their claws. Arcann's back boasted two sets of deep bleeding gashes, staining the back of his tunic. Bestia scanned the room and saw Heskai slumped against a wall, a lightsaber wound still smoldering in his chest. Shyren was doing everything to drive Arcann away from the other Scion.

Bestia and StyraK's lightsabers came to life, and they joined the fray. Shyren nodded and fell back immediately. They retreated towards the wall, grabbed Heskai and carried him out of the room. Arcann was no match for the two Dread Masters, especially when StyraK fired a huge bolt

of lightning at him, sending him into a column so hard it cracked. At the same time, the whole building shook with the impact of something from above.

"They're bombing the Asylum!" Bestia cried out, jumping out of the way of a chunk of the ceiling. It fell between her and Arcann, completely blocking the path. She would have to finish him off some other time.

Heskal lay slumped against a wall in a walkway outside, and Shyren crouched next to him, clutching his hand in their talons. They still haven't reverted to their human form. The beast would probably claim more of their body when they did, it always did. They heard approaching footsteps, and snarled, but stopped when they recognised Bestia.

"Please...help him. He's hurt."

"Styrak?"

Styrak nodded, and knelt before the Scions.

"My healing is not pleasant, but it will stabilise him."

"Thank you." Shyren rasped.

Styrak's hand hovered over the lightsaber stab wound in Heskal's chest, dark energy swirling around it. Heskal groaned in pain, as the energy literally forced his tissues to grow closed and repair themselves. The Scion opened his eyes, and for a moment, saw gods. visions of Izax and Tyth replaced the two outlanders for a moment, and then it was gone. He recognised the red haired Outlander.

"My vision... was wrong..." Came his broken whisper. "I brought this on all of us... I brought Arcann here. I'm sorry."

"You can tell the other Scions you're sorry whenever they choose to return."

Bestia sighed, then turned to Shyren. Heskai's words bore grim implications, but she had no time to consider them right now.

"There's a medic on our ship. You can take Heskai there. You both will be safe. It's in the docks, pretty impossible to miss."

"I'll help with defense after," Shyren promised.

They hauled Heskai onto their back. The old Scion held onto them as best as he could. Shyren then dropped to all fours and bounded away, shadows still leaking off their form.

"What are they? I thought the population of Zakuul was exclusively human?" Styraak asked, watching them go.

"I'm not sure, something about their old gods affecting people."

"Ah, the Chosen of the gods. I've heard of it but haven't seen such drastic changes. I will HAVE to research this later."

There was a beep, and Bestia picked up the holocom.

"Please tell me you're alive."

"We are. There are two Scions inbound, one wounded. I don't know what happened but Arcann was there."

"We have more problems."

"Tell me it's not the hyperdrive."

"Scorpio fixed that, but the Gravestone is locked in the dock. Koth and HK are on the way to the control tower."

"We'll head there then."

"I can take you directly to the control tower," Styrak said as soon as the call ended.

"Let's get to Koth and HK first and then fly up."

Styrak grumbled, but agreed. As soon as there was enough space, he picked Bestia up and shadowy wings spread behind his back, carrying him ahead while Bestia mowed any organic resistance with Force Fear. As they flew, Bestia saw Vaylin about to hurl a blast of lightning at them. She was interrupted by Senya leaping at her, lightsaber drawn. She also saw Shyren emerge from a building and dash towards the Gravestone. Past that, she saw Koth and HK barricaded at the entrance to the tower, with Lana zapping skytroopers with lightning. She pointed at them, and Styrak landed. The wings folded behind his back and faded out.

"Huh. Maybe the Heralds weren't wrong about the whole avatar of Zildrog thing..." Koth murmured in awe.

"I'm not the avatar. Rammas is. Supposedly."

"Wait, the short one with the weird eyes?"

Styrak simply nodded.

"Anyway. Arcann controls everything, and the override is on top of the tower. HK is up ahead clearing the way."

"Accommodation: I left you a trail of meatbags to follow, master!" HK sounded awfully happy over the holocom.

"I'm securing the doors as we go, so no more meatbags, I mean, reinforcements, arrive. Someone will have to hold the choke point though."

"That's my job." Lana said. "Senya is fighting Vaylin by the Gravestone."

"Wait, what? My crew!"

"They'll be okay," Bestia said. "Last time I saw Vaylin, she was very preoccupied. Besides, one of the Scions is the Chosen of Nahut, and they promised to assist. And they were a match even for me."

Koth gave her a worried and skeptical look.

"I could hold the choke point. Together with Lord Beniko, it will be trivial." Styrak offered.

"Good, we're decided. Let's go."

The team moved out. Styrak and Lana stayed behind. They had no trouble taking down waves of skytroopers and knights, while Koth led Bestia into a courtyard. A shuttle sat on a landing pad, no doubt stolen judging by a small pile of skytrooper scrap nearby, and the Zakuul insignia on its tail. Bestia hoped the insignia would prevent it from being shot down. The shuttle took off, the two people inside intent on getting as close to the top of the tower as they could.

"Valkorion was a good man, and he ruled Zakuul well. Why'd you kill him?" Koth started, sat in the pilot seat.

"I didn't. Technically, my daughter did. It's complicated, so I guess Arcann just decided to blame me. He was probably long gone by the time he died, though."

"What do you mean?"

"He was possessed by an entity named Vitiate, and from my own experience dealing with him, those he chooses as vessels don't stand a chance. I think he was preparing Zakuul as a sacrifice like he did with my homeworld."

"He was what?" Bestia could hear the gears turn inside Koth's mind.

"Possessed. I don't know if there was anything left of the original Valkorion. Wouldn't be surprised if Vitiate constructed a benevolent image to show to the people of Zakuul."

"That's... a lot."

They spent the rest of the trip in silence. They landed before another spire, and jogged through a series of hallways. HK really did a solid job clearing the path, with the promised trail of meatbags proudly on display all over the place. They found the droid on a platform with a cargo lift parked next to it. It was the only way into the tower itself as all personnel access had been blocked by Arcann. HK was waiting for them, a dead Zakuul Knight face down by his feet. Bestia let out a whistle. Either the droid was really that good, or the Knights really sucked.

"There's a whole battalion of Zakuul Knights headed your way!" Lana yelled between the sounds of blaster fire, screaming, and cracking of lightning. "And I still can't find Arcann anywhere. He's vanished."

"I got a bad feeling about this." Bestia muttered.

"I will be there shortly." The image of Styrak pushed into the view of the holocom, cut off awkwardly.

Bestia nodded and stepped onto the lift. Its locks disengaged with a clang, and it started a slow ascent. Meanwhile Koth and HK darted all over the platform, attaching a set of explosives in the back, closer to the exit, and what looked like a series of sensors farther along the platform, between the exit and the edge.

"And don't die out here. When I give the word, you run! Don't do anything reckless!" Bestia yelled, still in range.

"Me? Reckless? Never." Koth snorted. "The droid? Can't promise."

"Commentary: I am programmed for self-restraint. Usually."

Bestia could only watch as a large group of Knights and Skytroopers emerged onto the platform. As soon as they stepped between the sensors, there was an explosion, perfectly placed to take out most of them. Koth and HK jumped out from their hiding spots, quickly dispatching the few that remained. Bestia couldn't help but be impressed by their ingenuity. As a Force user, she rarely thought of ways to deal with her kind that didn't involve lightsabers, Force powers, or Force-powered punching. At least, that was the case in her youth. Since then she learned to consider other approaches. And yet, seeing two Force-blind individuals deal with a larger number of trained Force users was still impressive.

The lift finally docked with the upper level with a loud bang. Bestia quickly jogged over to the entrance to the control room and entered. It was empty. Suspiciously so. Bestia's bad feeling grew.

"There's no one here." She whispered into the holocom.

"Odd. I'd expect a token guard of Knights here..."

Bestia shared Lana's concerns. Should she wait for Styrak? He'd be arriving any moment. No, they really had no time. Koth's crew could do only so much to hold off the constant waves of Zakuul forces.

Bestia made her way to the controls and found the sequence to release the Gravestone. She looked at the screen, admiring her handiwork when a flash of gold caught her attention. She jumped back, in time to see Arcann slam his lightsaber into the exact spot she stood in moments ago. This day kept impressing her, didn't it? How did Arcann get a drop on her? Her senses must have dulled from having been in stasis for almost thirty years, then being holed up on Oricon, and then being frozen for five more years. She regarded Arcann, noting that he was coated in dust and there still was blood on his white clothes.

"Alright, I'll give you that: I am impressed. You caught me off guard."

"We have unfinished business!"

Arcann lunged at Bestia. She raised her lightsaber just in time to parry, and shoved him back, partly with Force, and partly physically. This enraged Arcann further.

"YOU DON'T TOUCH ME!"

"Guess we're back to pissbaby mode." Bestia sighed, parrying more of his attacks.

"And you'll be back on my wall! For eternity!" He snapped back.

"Like the last time?" Bestia taunted, jumping back and flipping Arcann off.

The fight began in earnest this time. Arcann seemed to rein his rage in, and in this calmer state, he focused on Force shields that shimmered gold around him. All of his abilities seemed to be tinged with gold, Bestia noticed. More importantly, the shields were extremely difficult to get through, even for her. It reminded her of Styrak's fighting style, as well as her oldest son's. Nothing would get through to them, unless their concentration was broken somehow. Arcann was focused, but Bestia could still sense the indignant rage still boiling under the surface within him. A beginning of a plan formed in her head. She jumped high in the air, and landed on the other side of the platform they were fighting on, pretending to run. Arcann growled and rushed towards her. Bestia side-stepped at the last moment, and Arcann's lightsaber sunk into one of the electrical cables lining the edges. There was a bright flash and a scream, Bestia herself

barely dodging the bolts of purple and gold lightning. The light show blinded her too, and when it faded, Arcann stood up slowly, all the anger now fully visible. He lunged at Bestia again, going full offensive this time. He was relentless, and Bestia found herself being backed against the edge of the platform. She struggled to parry his attacks, her lightsaber pike suddenly cumbersome and unfamiliar. She cursed for not rifling through the few dead knights she'd seen to find a regular lightsaber or two. And now, she was paying for it. Dearly. The golden blade pierced her stomach, and her legs buckled under her, suddenly out of her control. She lifted herself up on her arms, and raised one to send Force Fear into Arcann. She saw his hands glow gold as he readied a powerful blast of Force.

Time seemed to slow down as several things happened at once. First, HK came running in and jumped in front of Bestia the moment Arcann unleashed the golden blast. HK intercepted it, his body flung back and away where it lay still, smoldering and crackling. There was a scream. Koth, Bestia thought. A sound of a blaster shot, and a huge crate fell between Bestia and Arcann, stalling him. And then Bestia looked up, behind the Emperor, and saw StyraK emerge from below. Four wings held him aloft, completely black and covered in red eye spots. A powerful bolt of lightning held in one hand and his lightsaber in the other. StyraK let the lightning go, and it slammed into Arcann, throwing him all the way across the platform and over the railing.

Then both Koth and StyraK were by Bestia's side. Her vision grew blurry. She felt the dreadseed trying to stitch her spine back together.

"Welp. There goes my liver..." She croaked.

StyraK reached out, channeling the Force into her wound. It hurt like all the hells in every culture across the galaxy combined, but such was the price of Dark Side healing. Bestia grit her teeth as she felt her body grow itself back together, the bone and nerves and muscles, and felt the dreadseed try and encroach upon more of her organs. In the end, the combined pain was too much, and she passed out.

She woke up briefly on the way back, cradled in StyraK's arms, with Koth running by their side. At least she could feel her legs again, she thought, before darkness took her again. Then she was back on the ship, half laying in a chair by the viewport. The ship was up in space, faced off with an armada of the Eternal Fleet. There was shouting. Something about the cannon not being ready. Scorpio was the only calm voice among the chaos. Bestia saw the Gravestone fire off a few rounds out of its regular cannons. Even those seemed extremely effective against the

Eternal Fleet, sending explosions across the nearest vessel. She blinked. The stars stretched into lines and then into the blue fog of hyperspace. Bestia passed back out.

The Eternal Fleet continued bombarding the Asylum into nothingness. Throngs of spaceships kept trying to escape, most shot down by the Zakuulan forces. Vaylin prowled the streets, searching for something. She reached out into the Force, but her brother had always had a notable lack of a presence, so it didn't help much. She wandered up to a door and raised an arm to tear it off its hinges when it slid open on its own, revealing her brother. Arcann was scuffed and filthy, and there was some sort of a fruit peel stuck to his head. He smelled the part too. Vaylin chuckled at his unamused expression.

"Awww, you're dead and trying out a new profession? Garbage man." She asked mockingly. "The outlander got away. Mother, too."

Arcann let out an angry huff, picking the fruit peel off his head and throwing it away in disgust. At least the garbage dump softened his landing. Still, the outlander got away. That stupid old Scion also got away, and someone seemed to have warned the rest of their order about his arrival so he couldn't even kill all his friends. On top of that, his tunic was ruined and he smelled like literal trash. This was all around a bad day.

When Bestia woke up, the ship was docked, and daylight shone through the viewport. She slowly stood up, relieved that she could control her legs at all, and checked the spot where her wound was. It was gone, only a star-shaped scar and a hole in her shirt remained. There probably was a matching scar on her back too. She looked out of the viewport. Forests and cliffs as far as she could see on one side, and a larger cliff looming over the ship on the other. She could see movement at the base of the cliff. Squinting, she made out a gathering of people and crates with various supplies and equipment.

"Oh you're finally awake!" Lana appeared in the doorway. Bestia blinked at her, eyes adjusting back to the gloom of the ship. StyraK pushed his way past the other Sith to examine his wife.

"How long have I slept? Please don't tell me it's been another five years..."

"Just two days. Your wound is healed."

"Thanks." Bestia hugged StyraK. "I suppose I had underestimated Arcann and his anger."

StyraK nodded.

"Where are we anyway?"

"Odessen. A secluded planet in wild space."

"I see."

Bestia walked with Lana and StyraK to the ship exit. Koth joined them on the way.

"Can't believe we've found a place where nothing wants to kill us."

"Yeah. What did I miss?"

"I lost some crew on Asylum. Could have been much worse if Vaylin got to them but... Senya really saved the day."

"And I will always be there." Senya emerged from a side passage, joining the procession.

"Credit where credit is due, that Scion pulled their weight as well."

"We lost HK though. He took a huge Force blast for me."

Koth lowered his head in respect.

"Isn't there a backup though?"

Koth shook his head.

"Say, speaking of Scions, how are Shyren and Heskali doing?"

This time it was StyraK's turn to reply. "Heskali is stable but it will take him some time to recover. His wound was a dangerous one."

"He apparently called Arcann to the Asylum. Something about a vision."

"Shyren told me about that. They had a vision of their own and acted on it. All the other Scions are on the run."

Lana threw her hands into the air. "With friends like that, who needs enemies?"

"The other Scions are still on our side. They'll return, probably." Bestia shrugged.

"How about we stop depressing each other?" Koth said.

"Right. The good news is, the Battle of Asylum showed the Galaxy Zakuul isn't invincible. My contacts in the Core worlds decided to throw their support behind us. Behind you."

Bestia stopped.

"Wait, what?"

"You're about to become the leader of an alliance against the Eternal Throne."

"Whoa whoa whoa. Wait. Slow down. Are you SURE about this? I'm a Dread Master. Part of a group that literally bullied the whole Galaxy. And you want ME to lead an alliance of people who probably still remember the Dread War?"

"Well...look at it as atonement?"

"Hm. I...guess? Still, if your allies take one look at me and Styrak and go back to their worlds, don't say I didn't warn you. I hope it's not too different from commanding Dread Guard."

"You won't be alone. You'll have us."

"No offense but you're not the other Dread Masters," Bestia sighed. "It sounds like I don't have much of a choice."

They now stood in front of a tall broad cliff face with drills mounted before it. A gaggle of Imperial, Republic, and even a few Maldalorians were milling and standing about, waiting for something. They stepped aside before Bestia, a murmur running over the crowd.

"Do the honors of turning on the drill?" Lana pointed ahead with a little joking curtsy.

"Alright. I can do that."

Bestia walked towards the drill controls. All the parameters were already keyed in, someone just had to give the go command. Bestia sighed, and pressed the key. The drill whirled to life, moving in towards the cliff face.

She heard another murmur go over the crowd, and turned around. It seemed Lana tricked her into ending up before the crowd. Everyone was staring at her. Styrak made his way to stand by her side, glaring. His mask was on. Lana was giving her a thumbs up. She could sense uncertainty and fear from the people. They were expecting something. A speech, maybe? That seemed like the right thing to do.

"Okay. I don't know what Lana is thinking, putting a Dread Master in charge."

There was more murmuring among the crowd, and Bestia saw recognition and fear in a few older-looking faces. Lana looked nervous. She continued.

"If most of you turn around and leave, I won't blame you. But I think we're all in the same boat here, displaced by the Eternal Empire."

She scanned the crowd again. A few nodded, mostly Sith, judging from the dark robes. Bestia sighed.

"I will spare you my tragic backstory, but suffice to say being a Dread Master wasn't my first choice of occupation. Maybe for me it's a chance to do something good for once. I give my power as a Dread Master into the service of this Alliance. May the Eternal Empire fall like all empires do."

It seemed like a reference to a band Rammas was always listening to, managed to win some points. A few cheers rang out from the crowd, but mostly the mood was still uncertain and slightly scared. At least it wasn't outright hostility or fear, and no one was leaving. It was the best Bestia could hope for, and Styrak hovering next to her in his mask didn't help. Even those who weren't aware of the Dread Masters saw two tall intimidating Sith. She stepped away from the ledge, away from the gathering. She had a lot of work ahead of her. Sure, this Alliance wasn't Dread Guard, but she still silently vowed to put as much effort into it as she could. Maybe Lana was right and it was a chance to put some good deeds under her belt, to weigh against the crimes she had committed as a Dread Master. An odd bit of insight to come from a Sith. She also had at least three other Dread Masters to locate. The Alliance could also possibly provide her with resources to do so, and later on, to pursue Vitiate.

Reunions

Chapter Summary

The Alliance establishes itself on Odessen, Bestia goes on a mission, and reunions happen.

The upcoming weeks were a welcome respite. Bestia spent them sleeping, training, and exploring the woods of Odessen. Styrak often joined her as the crowded base and the noise of the construction wore him down. Apparently the planet was picked by Lana for being remote and isolated, but most importantly, powerful in the Force. Unlike Oricon that was steeped in the Dark Side, or Tython that leaned towards the Light, Odessen was balanced. Neutral. Bestia wondered if her, Styrak's, and eventually, other Dread Masters' presence alone would tilt the balance in favour of darkness.

She often saw Heskai and Shyren out in the woods as well, as soon as Heskai was well enough to leave the medbay. Shyren's posture seemed more hunched, and their arms were now covered in long black fur. They had trouble moving. Shyren also seemed to take a liking to Styrak, which made his research on Zakuul's Old God quirk easier.

According to Shyren and Heskai's accounts, the Old Gods blessed the people of Zakuul, each god ruling over a part of the solar cycle. Those born during a specific period had a chance to become Chosen of the god associated with that period. Heskai was born during a period called Scyva's Tears, an early spring. He was a gifted healer, and his life was fraught with sorrow. Shyren was born during Nahut's Shadow and was a Chosen of Nahut. Chosen of Nahut were rare, as the gift of the Hated Son was a painful one.

Despite the odds, the construction of the base went swimmingly. Bestia and Styrak even got some points for Force Levitating huge boulders together with a whole host of other Force Users. The newly formed Eternal Alliance worked tirelessly to gather resources and information to use against Arcann. The name was Lana's idea, and Bestia wondered if she had Zakuulan ancestry. Lana definitely had the Zakuulan flair for theatrics. Bestia herself thought the name was somewhat too loud. Nothing was truly eternal after all. Even the universe itself would experience a heat death at one point, and everything would be truly gone. Even fear wasn't eternal by that logic. The alliance would likely fall apart soon after Zakuul, the main reason for its existence, is defeated.

Bestia was a pretty hands off leader. Back on Oricon she let her Dread Guard make decisions for themselves and run them by her. Opposite of her fellow Dread Master Raptus, who preferred to dominate his Dread Guard's will and control them like pieces on a game board. Bestia let Lana run things, staying out of the spotlight. She thought it would be better to not draw attention to her person more than needed. People still stared at her and Styrak in the hallways. She wondered if they knew of what she was, or were just intimidated by her and Styrak's large presences and Styrak's mask.

Bestia helped with the alliance where needed, and let it run itself, as long as she was kept in the loop. However, it was to change when Theron, the former Republic agent, and Lana's long time ally, returned from a trip to Zakuul with a terrorist named Kaliyo in tow. At least he was able to prevent Kaliyo from destroying a large chunk of the city. It took only a short conversation in the cantina for Bestia to form a negative opinion of their new recruit. While, as a Dread Master, she appreciated the power of fear, Kaliyo's tactics were cruelty and destruction for their own sake. This might have been good in Raptus's books, but this was not how Bestia operated.

She had stern words with Theron, in the same breath commencing him on securing the information from Zakuul's Intelligence offices, and reprimanding him on his choice of allies. Even during their previous interactions back on Ziost, the two never got along, Theron still only seeing her as a potential threat, despite the fact that Bestia volunteered to assist with the situation, and her Dread Guard helped evacuate the civilians from the planet, saving them from being devoured by Vitiate. Now, he had even more of a reason to dislike her.

When Theron brought up the presence of another contact on Zakuul, Bestia decided to come with him. And so now she was back in the swamps of Zakuul, following Theron along one of the paths towards a clearing where his contacts set up a meeting. The moment they stepped into the clearing, Bestia saw a red dot fix firmly on Theron's forehead, and as she suspected, her own.

"One move, and you won't be scaring anyone ever again, Sith!" A gruff voice called out.

"Well so much for new allies," Bestia gave Theron a side eye. She wouldn't put it past him to try and lure her into this trap.

"We're from the Alliance," she called out to the darkness, keeping as still as she could. "Is this how you greet new allies?"

"I'm taking precautions," The voice replied.

Several figures emerged from various hiding spots around the clearing. At their front, was a feline Cathar with dark orange fur and glowing green eyes. He looked Bestia up and down.

"I would have given up my pension to shoot a Dread Master. Can't believe one is now our best hope at defeating Zakuul."

"You and me both, Jorgan..." Theron mumbled.

"Well, hello to you too, sir." Bestia sighed.

"Aric, please don't shoot my mother."

A tall Pureblood in muted camo armor approached the group. Moonlight lit a white spot on his forehead and reflected off red eyes.

"Hello." He said curtly.

"Seid?" Bestia couldn't believe her eyes. She hadn't seen him in person since Ziost, only through a holo transmission.

"Yeah. Reunions would have to wait but I'm glad you're okay."

He stepped back, letting the Cathar take charge again.

"Major Jorgan, Havoc Squad."

"Bestia, Dread Masters. And, I guess, the Eternal Alliance." She rolled her eyes at the pretentious name.

"You supposedly killed the emperor."

"It's complicated. I'll tell the story later. I think Seid would want to know too." She nodded at her son. "I'm just here to meet Theron's allies in person this time."

"And we have an op we could use backup with."

"Ah, good, so I won't have to stand around glaring daggers at Shan here."

There was a flash of movement in the canopy above, and Aric suddenly shot his rifle up. A probe fell down into the clearing, smoldering and sparking.

"They're on us. Everyone, you know the drill." He pointed at Bestia. "You're supposed to be some kind of great warrior? Prove it."

It wasn't long until Skytroopers were swarming the location. Bestia cleaved through the smaller ones with ease, as did Aric and his squad. However, Zakuul didn't just send the basic skytroopers. A huge assault walker dropped from above, its cannons trained on Bestia. She grumbled under her breath, and jumped away. The cannon blasts left small craters in their wake, but Bestia was simply too fast. She went for the long multi jointed legs of this machine, her lightsaber stabbing into the joints. The walker staggered and fell, the driver quickly dispatched by Aric.

"Clear!" A voice came from the left.

"Clear!" Replied another.

"That won't be the last of them," Aric grumbled, before turning around and firing off commands to his squad. He took Bestia and Seid, and the three of them were to cover the others' retreat.

"There's more skytroopers out in the jungle. We need to distract them. For that, I need a vantage point. Let's go."

Bestia and Seid exchanged a look, then nodded, and followed Aric into the forest. As they hiked, Bestia quietly told Aric and her son the whole story of the emperor's death, how Sharack was the one to deal the final blow and how Vitiate left Valkorion's body. Seid listened quietly.

"You really weren't kidding about it being complicated," Aric said. "So, basically, you were framed because the Hero of Tython came back from the dead, stabbed the emperor, and then disappeared?"

"Pretty much. I was knocked out so her disappearing is my speculation."

"And that's the same Jedi you were assigned to?" Aric turned to Seid.

"Yeah. I was the common sense between the two of us." He sighed. "I thought I saw her leaving Zios. I was at the orbital station and saw a shadow fly in the space outside."

"Have you seen her since?" Bestia asked.

Seid shook his head.

"She doesn't return messages either. Left on read."

The small group made it to a cliff edge overlooking a canyon. It was well hidden by trees, and provided a good vantage point in Bestia's opinion. It seemed Aric thought so too.

"Here. You two, cover my back."

He laid down, one eye peeled to the scope of his rifle. Being a Cathar, he didn't even need a night vision aid.

"So, this new Emperor. I take it you've met him. Your assessment?"

Bestia groaned.

"He's extremely powerful, enough so to have caught me off guard," She admitted. "But also he is very immature and easy to anger. I think those qualities can be used against him. He lashes out like a rabid beast."

Aric hummed in acknowledgement of the information received.

"Nothing but tyrants left in the galaxy."

"Not even the Republic?" Bestia raised an eyebrow spike.

"The Republic doesn't really exist anymore." Seid said quietly. "At least not the one I grew up in. I think it's partly why Sharack didn't bother returning."

"Saresh is pretty much a dictator now."

"Why am I not surprised?" Bestia spat.

Saresh was the leader of the Republic, a very forceful and adamant woman who had proven that she got things done. A quality Bestia respected, except Saresh hated Bestia, continuously calling for her and other Dread Masters' execution even as Bestia and Calphayus tried to negotiate peace after both the empire and the Republic came knocking on Oricon's gates. Saresh called for the operation that resulted in Styra's death too. If Styra didn't die, the Force link connecting the Dread Masters wouldn't have destabilised. And if THAT didn't happen, their collective mental states wouldn't have tanked, preventing them from lashing out at the galaxy. Styra's apprentices managed to save him, basically pulling him back from the dead, and he returned a few months later, but he wasn't the same. The link was restored but Styra had scars to deal with, both physical and mental. He was traumatized, and Bestia could feel his mental anguish, something that he still was working through years later. Sure, what he was doing on that planet was probably reprehensible but also, no one would miss those criminals and underworld dealers? Right? Their resources would have been far better used in the hands of the Dread Masters. In any case, Saresh was adamant about not letting the Dread Masters make strides towards peace with at least one faction that hated them.

"I take it you're not a fan either?" Aric asked.

"Yeah. Imagine someone trying to get you killed even though you want to at least try doing something not evil for once?"

"Hmmm can't fully relate. In fact, she made the Republic do things that didn't sit well with me, so I left to fight a fight I can at least believe in."

"I see."

"Wait... got something."

Bestia and Seid perked up, as did Aric. He watched something through the scope.

"Civilians. And Skytroopers. Looks like they're in trouble."

"What do you want to do?" Asked Seid.

"We're helping them."

Bestia nodded.

"I'll jump down, and you two cover me. The droids shouldn't be a problem."

Bestia crawled to the edge of the cliff and peered down. She saw a convoy of skytroopers leading a group of ragged humans along the bottom of the canyon. Exiles, like the three Koth had brought aboard the Gravestone. Those who questioned Arcann's regime, or followed the Old Ways, an old Zakuulan religion.

Bestia gave Seid and Aric a nod, then started hopping down from ledge to ledge, her final jump bringing her on top of one of the Skytroopers, mashing it into the mud. A quick stab of her lightsaber finished the droid. The rest weren't much of a challenge either, although Bestia had to dance around terrified humans. She's gotten better at wielding the lightsaber spear, and made quick work of the nearest skytrooper, cutting it in half with a graceful sweep. Another droid received a blast of energy from above, and a third had its eyes shot out before another shot severed its head completely.

Before long, Bestia stood in front of the cowering exiles. She sighed, looking at them. She knew how to bring fear, but wasn't good with comforting people. Seid and Aric made their way down the slope and came to her aid.

"Hello. Is everyone okay?" Seid did his best reassuring smile. A bit too toothy if anyone asked Bestia, but it seemed to work.

"Any injured?" Aric piped up.

"You saved us!" One of the exiles cried out. "And... I don't think so. Thank you!"

"What happened?"

"The droids are burning our homes! Please, stop them! There are other people out there!"

Bestia gave her companions a grim look.

"Arcann is doing this to his own people?! Guess we're on a rescue mission now."

Aric nodded.

"It's weird to see a Sith be so... kind, but I'm not going to complain." He turned to the exiles.

"Gather anyone you can. Seid, you're with them. Get them back to camp. We'll clear out the settlement, rescue everyone we can, and rendezvous there."

Seid nodded to both him and Bestia, then gently herded the exiles along the path that presumably led towards the Havoc camp. Bestia and Aric made their way in the opposite direction. Eventually the narrow canyon opened up into a valley that held the Exile settlement. Flames and smoke rose from the ramshackle buildings made of spaceship parts and wood. Even from a distance, Bestia could see skytroopers patrolling every level. Some of them held flamethrowers and were methodically moving from hut to hut, incinerating everything.

Bestia heard a long scream from one of the houses and winced. Aric took it as a sign to head in before anyone else would be burned alive. Bestia took a deep breath and followed. Between her jumping around with a lightsaber, and Aric's aim, they were done with the Skytroopers quickly. The two of them then went through the village, knocking on doors of every house until they found one that still had people hiding inside. Aric coaxed them out and told them to head along the path until they saw others. Rinse and repeat for every house still standing.

"I think that's all of them..." Bestia said. "I don't sense anyone else."

"Let's head back then."

They ended up catching up with the exiles they saved from the settlement, and walked all the way to where Seid had gathered the other humans. There were angry shouts coming from the ragged crowd. Bestia couldn't blame them. To these people, she was the one who toppled their way of life. They only knew the version that Arcann had fed them: that Bestia was responsible for the death of Valkorion, and, consequently, for the rise of Arcann's cruel and oppressive rule. A brown-skinned man with short curly hair and a beard stepped ahead, pointing an accusatory finger at Bestia.

"You doomed us the moment you came here! I do believe you had good intentions, but good intentions pave the road to Zildrog's lair. Now Arcann is going to make an example of us."

"Okay but why is he so interested in ruining your lives even further?"

The man sighed and turned to the crowd.

"Because we doubt. Tell them."

Another man stepped out, an older one.

"I asked for proof of how the immortal Emperor could ever die."

"I practiced the Old Ways," said another.

"I wondered why Zakuul sought revenge on the rest of the galaxy for the actions of one," said a third.

"And I sought justice for those exiled," said the man who spoke up initially. "We asked questions. The emperor doesn't like questions. And now you gave him a reason to kill us all."

Bestia stood there, silent, the gears in her mind turning. They could smuggle this group out like they did before, but did Havoc Squad have access to transport? Aric seemed to have similar thoughts.

"We have a camp nearby. For now, we can offer you protection."

The camp wasn't far away. It was situated in an old ruin, surrounded by tall crumbling walls. Their construction looked somewhat like the Dark Temple on Dromund Kaas, Bestia thought. The temple was built by Vitiate to house a variety of dark artifacts, using plans supplied by one of the Dread Masters. Bestia wondered if this also used to be a temple to Vitiate, or if the humans of Zakuul came from the Empire, or if Vitiate stole the idea from the Zakuulans. The walls provided protection to several large tents, and the stone floor made a good landing site. Various members of Havoc Squad milled about.

Seid led Bestia and Aric to the largest tent. Theron was already there, examining something on a datapad together with a dark-skinned woman in Havoc armor.

"Welcome back, sir." The woman said. "The refugees are settling in but we don't have enough supplies to feed so many people for long."

"We'll settle for shelter and protection for now, and continue our mission tomorrow. Get some shut eye."

The woman nodded, and jogged off to relay the orders to others. Aric turned to Bestia.

"You may be a Sith Lord, and you may be in charge of the Alliance, but this squad is mine to run. Understood?"

Bestia lifted her hands in an appeasing motion.

"No arguments here. First of all the Alliance was Lana's idea, and I'm just here along for the ride. Second, I won't boss you around. Wouldn't want you to try to tell me how to run my Dread Guard, so we're on the same page here."

Aric nodded, looking somewhat less grumpy. Bestia found an out of the way spot and settled in for the night. She'd need her strength tomorrow for whatever mission Havoc needed help with.

Next morning Bestia, Aric, Theron, and the exile who called her out first last night gathered in the tent around the holotable. Bestia side eyed the man curiously. The exiles didn't seem like the fighting type. Most Zakuulans seemed sheltered and meek, except the scant human military personnel like Koth and his squad.

"Pashna will be joining us in an advisory capacity. He knows more about Zakuul than all of us."

"I see," Bestia nodded.

"You saved us yesterday. I want to help."

"My sources dropped some interesting data recently," Aric gave Theron a meaningful stare. Theron just shrugged. "There's a planetary transmitter not far away from here, in a Knight outpost. Our mission is to place a wiretap on it."

"So we could spy on their communications?" Bestia asked.

"Yes. We get a direct line on their communications, and Havoc could use the intel to hit high value targets and avoid detection."

"Couldn't you have done it already?" Bestia tilted her head to the side.

"We'd be either needing a month of prep or a really big distraction."

"I take it we're going with the distraction plan," Bestia turned to Pashna. "You're from Zakuul. What would get the Knights' attention?"

The man hummed, thinking for a bit.

"I'd say, either an evacuation, panic, or a grand parade. And I doubt the alliance can arrange that. There hasn't been one since Emperor Valkorion's death. I doubt we can trigger an evacuation either."

Bestia chuckled darkly, raising a fist surrounded by black and red Force energy.

"Panic it is then."

She caught Theron glaring daggers at her, and lowered her arm, the dark aura dissipating. Pashna looked at her warily.

"I'm good at making people very scared with the Force, basically," Bestia explained. "The Knights will see every beast of their nightmares come out of these woods."

"Then it's decided. Bestia here will be the distraction."

"I'll call Odessen and let them know," Theron said.

The next day Bestia, Havoc Squad, and the Zakuulan refugees woke up to a steady drizzle. It grew into a downpour by the time Bestia and Havoc moved out to the Knight outpost. It could cover their approach, but it would also blind them.

The outpost was constructed on two large platforms over a pond, with a covered bridge leading to a main road. The lower platform served as parking for the speeders, and the upper platform had some small buildings around a larger square central one with a massive antenna jutting out from its roof. The transmitter. Their target.

Right now, the outpost was swarming with Knights. Not for long though, as suddenly most of them ran to the speeders and flew away. A transmission came in from Lana, informing Bestia that the Alliance started its attack elsewhere. This was Bestia's cue to enact her own part in the plan. She drew a deep breath and focused, letting her power seep into the surroundings. It crept around the base, and then Aric saw the few remaining knights become increasingly fidgety until several of them mounted speeders and fled, clearly panicking. He wondered what the Dread Master showed them. Still, it was nowhere near what he expected or heard about.

"I thought the Dread Masters were all-powerful. Armies cowering in fear and all that?"

"We're stronger together, and some people can resist Force Fear. That, and I'm not going into deep meditation in the middle of a damp cold jungle surrounded by people who distrust me. Don't want to wake up in Belsavis prison again. Anyway, let's go. The remaining knights should be easy targets."

They were. In fact, Bestia and Aric spent more time trying to figure out how to unlock the door of the communications tower without a passcode. They ended up running around the two platforms searching for hidden switches. Finally, a combination of four switches overrode the force field, and it dissipated.

"I hope no one recorded us having zoomies in the bloody rain," Bestia grumbled when they finally made it inside. She immediately shook herself off, sending droplets of water everywhere.

Aric just crept ahead. The communication center was empty, as expected. All of the personnel were truly gone. The Cathar made a cursory sweep of the interior before getting to work on the transmitter console. Bestia was left to stand guard. She silently paced the distance between the entrance and the console. Suddenly, Aric cursed.

"What's wrong?"

"I installed the wiretap, and it's working, but they know we're here."

As if on cue, automatic turrets sprung in the corners and started shooting at the pair. Bestia dashed to the nearest turret, dispatching it quickly while Aric ducked behind the console and

shot another. The remaining two were dealt with quickly, and Bestia and Aric bolted back out into the rain.

A group of skytroopers was already on the lower platform, and Bestia leapt at them. A barrage of panicked transmissions from the main forces accompanied her, all relaying the same thing: they were overrun and needed to retreat. There wouldn't be reinforcements then. No matter, Bestia faced worse odds in the past.

The pair slowly, painfully fought their way towards the edge of the platform where a small tunnel led into the jungle. Aric looked exhausted, and Bestia herself began tiring out.

Bestia and Aric skidded to a stop before the bridge tunnel, as Bestia spotted a group of golden clad Knights entering the opposite end of the tunnel. Even she wouldn't go against such a large group of Force users. She was too tired, and there was a chance the Knights resisted her Force Fear. That, and she had learned the lesson from Styra's fatal mistake.

"Ah shit here we-", She wasn't able to finish. There was a bright flash and a boom, and the Knights were engulfed in flames that poured into the tunnel. Bestia winced as she watched them cook inside their armor. A horrible way to go, even in her Dread Master opinion. At least it was quick. Figures emerged from the surrounding shadows, and Pashna stepped forward. He had a grenade launcher.

"About...time?" Aric muttered.

"Thought we'd not make it in time. Glad to be wrong."

"How'd you know?"

"We heard the transmissions. When it became clear that things got dire, we knew what we had to do."

"That was brave of you." Bestia said, leaning tiredly on her lightsaber spear.

"We've been protected our whole lives. By droids, by you. I wanted to stand for myself, and so did the others."

"Commendable," Aric said. "Let's get back to camp."

Back at the camp, Bestia sat on a crate, a warm drink in her hands and a blanket on her shoulders. She listened to Aric and Theron discuss the results of the mission. They stood by the large holotable with Pashna and the rest of Havoc Squad.

"The mission was a success," Theron declared. "And we discovered a new ally."

"I think the exiles were extremely brave today," Bestia said.

Aric nodded. "This was more of a victory for them than for us. Finding the will to fight back and winning. Arcann's growing his own defeat in these swamps."

"What goes around comes back around. I take it you want to stay on Zakuul and possibly train the Exiles into a rebellion."

"Not me, but the rest of Havoc. I'm going to accompany you to see that Alliance of yours."

"I like the idea. The Alliance can get them equipment."

"Then it's decided."

Bestia, Theron, and Aric departed right away. Seid decided to stay with the rest of the squad. Bestia spent the trip trying to dry out her mane of hair after it had gotten soaked in the rain. She gave up eventually. Her hair would have to wait until Odessen.

Bestia emerged from the shuttle only to find herself in the middle of yet another conflict. Aric raised an eyebrow, but chose to leave with Theron, presumably to be introduced to Lana and discuss provisions for the rebels. Bestia suspected they also wanted to avoid dealing with Force users. So she was the one left to deal with the confrontation before her.

At least this conflict was purely verbal: two groups of Scions stood opposite each other. Well, one was a large group, led by a dark skinned woman with a large afro and brown eyes, and the other group consisted of just Heskai and Shyren. There were other unmasked Scions in the larger group, and Bestia recognized them from their hideout in Asylum. The woman in the front was in the middle of pointing an accusatory finger at Heskai.

"Your false vision nearly led to our order being wiped out! What do you have to say for yourself, Heskai?"

Heskai bowed his head.

"I believed it was my time to die. Our time to die. I was wrong."

"Well, that's glaringly obvious, isn't it?" The woman spat.

Heskai kept his head bowed meekly. Shyren stood by him, but made no moves to intervene.

"You chased after the very first vision you received." A deep voice rang out from behind the larger group of Scions. Bestia turned to look, recognising the voice. A stocky Sith Pureblood with curly greying hair and sideburns stood among the Scions. Calphayus, her father. It seemed like the Dread Masters were regathering themselves. "It is a mistake I made in my youth. The future is always in motion. What you see is just one outcome, easily changed. Do not be swayed and alarmed by it."

Heskai looked up at Calphayus, his silver eyes full of despair.

"What is to be my fate then?" He asked no one in particular.

"You are excommunicated from the Scion order. Effective immediately." The woman said, matter of fact.

She turned and walked away, the other Scions following her. Maral, the big man Bestia fought, gave Heskai a sorrowful look over his shoulder before leaving too. Only one masked Scion was left behind, walking slowly to stand with Heskai and Shyren. The Scion was short and thin, but moved with grace. He silently put a hand on Heskai's shoulder. Heskai sighed, covering it with his.

"Hate to say it, but Oramis is right." Shyren said.

Heskal glared at them, but then lowered his head in resignation. All three of them started walking away. Bestia walked up to Calphayus. The two hugged each other tightly.

"I'm so glad to see you!" Bestia said, looking Calphayus over.

"Our paths cross again," The older Dread Master proclaimed, smiling slightly. "As I knew they would."

"What the kriff has happened here?" Bestia asked. "I mean, with the Scions?"

Calphayus shrugged.

"I don't know Heskal's side of the story. It seems he had a misguided vision that put my new friends in danger, but someone else had another vision, and the danger was averted. And the Scions are now rightfully angry at Heskal."

"When did you even find the Scions?"

"I didn't. Fate led them to me, and then a Holonet message from Rammas led us here."

"I see. It's so good to have you here! Styrak's here too. Probably walking in the woods or sitting on the roof, or in the lab. He really took to that Hutt scientist."

Calphayus smiled, and nodded. They walked together, his staff clacking on the floor as he used it to check for any obstacles before him.

"Let's go find Styrak, shall we?"

Rammas's Bizarre Adventure

Chapter Summary

Bestia is sent on a mission. Meanwhile, back at the base, Styrak and Rammas help Cael, a Scion, to find Heskal and Shyren. They get separated, and Rammas wakes up in a spaceship.

Basically what the title says.

Man. This chapter is a biggun.

The Alliance Command gathered around the large table. Despite having worked together for a while, some members of the Command still gave Bestia a wide berth, and clustered on the opposite end of the table. Aric Jorgan was present via holo from Zakuul, hovering next to rapidly blinking images, pieces of code, text fragments, and diagrams. Everyone was watching Scorpio run analysis of the data stolen from Zakuul. Even with her enormous processing power, it took her several minutes to find anything interesting. The flashing images stopped at a schematic of what looked like an immensely deep shaft that led to an underground facility. A red circle pulsed, depicting a signal that emanated from it.

"There's a relay buried below the Spire." Theron started explaining. "From cross referencing the data stolen by our contacts on Zakuul, it appears to be the main source of Gemini Frequency."

"And what's that?" Bestia asked.

"A signal used to command the Eternal Fleet."

"So if we hijack or disrupt it, we could do a ton of damage?"

"Exactly."

"You won't even get near that relay." Senya interrupted. "It's deep underground and there's more safeguards than you can count."

Theron looked at her across the table. "The data we have has instructions on how to disable all of them. But we have to act now."

"Kaliyo and Major Jorgan are already on Zakuul." Lana said. "They're in a perfect position for the task."

The mention of Kaliyo got the two Zakuulans in the crowd bristling. Bestia couldn't blame them. Kaliyo had been terrorising Zakuul for at least two years, and not everyone who ended up dying as a result was a Knight or an Arcann supporter. Theron could barely stop her from blowing up several apartment blocks within the city. In the end, he convinced her to blow out the electric grid, which satisfied her need for chaos. For now.

"We are not sending that terrorist! She has done enough to my world."

"You know, for once, I agree with Senya." Koth crossed his arms, scowling.

Bestia sighed. "Look. I don't like Kaliyo at all. I would not let her near Oricon. But Lana's right. She and Jorgan are in a good position. If I could, I'd send two of the Dread Masters instead. But they're not here, and we can't afford waiting. I can go with Kaliyo and Jorgan myself if it ensures the mission's success."

Bestia put her hands on her hips and looked over the gathering. Koth and Senya side-eyed her, and Theron gave her a distrustful glare. Lana was the only one who nodded, despite the Empire having a bounty on the heads of Bestia and her fellow Dread Masters.

"It would be best if you went with them. We will need two teams: one to create a distraction and draw Arcann's attention and the other for the mission itself. I personally recommend taking Kaliyo with you to the relay. She's an experienced infiltrator who survived on Zakuul for years."

"And so I could keep an eye on her," Bestia growled. "That would leave Havoc Squad on the distraction."

A pang of worry stabbed at her as she thought of her son Seid who was in Havoc Squad. The distraction seemed the slightly less dangerous mission of the two but she was worried. She reminded herself that he was an adult and has done fine up until this point. He didn't need her hovering over him. The holo of Jorgan glared at her, unhappy, adding to the impressive collection of angry stares she's been amassing today.

"We should destroy the relay, Commander."

Bestia shook her head.

"Gaining control of it is more beneficial in the long run. Why waste a good resource? Especially once Brontes and Tyrans are located. The Eternal Fleet destroyed Oricon, and they'd be all over a way to sabotage the thing that destroyed the Dread Palace. That, and I like the irony of Arcann being shot down by his own ships."

Jorgan's frown deepened.

"So you and your Dread Masters cronies get control of the most powerful fleet in the known space? I don't think so. Send Havoc into the spire to destroy the relay while you and Kaliyo create a distraction."

Bestia growled quietly. It took her a few moments to rein in the anger that rose inside her at the accusation. She had to admit, with the Dread Masters' record, Jorgan was fully within his right to assume the worst. She took a deep breath, and exhaled loudly.

"You have the right to distrust me. But the fleet would be a perfect weapon against Vitiate. He can't devour droids."

"It would be an asset to the Alliance." Lana agreed.

"I'm willing to give the access codes to the rest of the Alliance Command. How's that for a show of goodwill?" Bestia inclined her head to the side. She frankly just wanted to be elsewhere and was starting to understand Styrak's aversion to people. It was time to change the subject.

"Anyway. Do we have any additional info we could use on this mission?"

"It is a long shot, but maybe the Scions know something?" Lana stroked her chin. "Heskal was a fairly high ranking individual as the leader of the Scions before his exile, was he not?"

"I could go ask him," Bestia jumped at the opportunity to leave. "Shouldn't take long and then I'll head over to the hangar."

The rest of the command murmured in agreement, and Bestia was gone from the room as fast as she could. She stormed down the hallway, happy to be alone with her anger and frustration.

She growled out loud, and threw her hands up. If only Brontes and Tyrans were here! Their skills with technology and strategic prowess would have been irreplaceable. But they weren't here, and there hasn't been a word from them for a while. Bestia punched the rock wall, finally letting the remnants of her anger out, and let out a loud sigh.

Now, to find Heskai. Bestia honestly doubted he knew anything. He wasn't really a part of the military, and there wasn't any reason for him to have access to that sort of info, but maybe he had visions to share. The whole idea to go talk to him was probably Lana's ruse to get Bestia out of the room because she noticed the Dread Master seething. Bestia was grateful for it. She looked around the corridor to get her bearings and then jogged in the direction of Heskai and Shyren's quarters.

Bestia rounded a corner when something collided with her. She looked down to see Cael, the short Scion who usually was with Heskai and Shyren all the time. Distress and fear rolled off him in waves.

"Hello, Cael. Have you seen Heskai? I need to talk to him."

"He is... gone. Shyren's Nahut gift has taken them, and they ran off, and Heskai went after them. He has been gone for a while, and I cannot reach him on the holocom. I also meant to speak to you."

Cael's voice and manner of speech struck Bestia as oddly formal and familiar. Although with the distortion the Scion masks provided, it was difficult to compare his voice to any other voice that Bestia could remember.

"I'd love to help, but I have to head back to Zakuul. Critical Alliance mission stuff. We can go get my husband or Calphayus instead."

Cael shook his head. Bestia felt the despair coming off of him. Then the man took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. He has come to a decision.

"I have something to tell you. It is urgent."

Bestia huffed, feeling anger rise inside her again. She pushed it down.

"Fine, but make it quick."

They made their way to the room Cael shared with Heskai and Shyren. Thankfully it was close by. Cael shut the door after making sure the hallway beyond was empty. Then he turned to Bestia, who paced restlessly, and reached for his mask. Bestia's pacing came to a screeching halt when Cael removed the mask and lowered the hood. She was staring in disbelief at the face of Valkorion, the supposedly dead Emperor of Zakuul. She gaped at him. He looked better than he had in the throne room. Gone were the dark circles under his eyes, and he didn't seem as thin.

"No way. You're supposed to be dead. Sharack killed you."

"She nearly did. The wound took me close enough to death to excise Tenebrae out of my body. I ought to thank her upon our next meeting."

"That will be the weirdest thank you message in the history of the galaxy, probably. Hello, thanks for stabbing me to death! But how are you alive?"

"Heskal is a very good healer. He and his Scions took me in under the guise of preparing my body for burial. Instead, I was healed and smuggled out, and my casket buried empty. I do not think Arcann knows, but he ordered to destroy the Scions all the same. The Scions took me away to a faraway jungle planet where I have been recovering ever since."

"You should take the throne back. End this war. Despite Vitiate, Zakuul's people seem to love you."

"I should," Valkorion let out a heavy sigh, suddenly looking tired again. "And I will. At least for as long as it takes for Zakuul to heal enough that it could be left in the hands of a worthy successor. I have no desire to rule."

"I assume Calphayus already knows."

"We found him on that planet. A prophet who eclipsed anything the Scions could ever dream of. He was kind to us. He knew who we were before Heskal could even introduce himself."

"Yeah that sounds like him alright. Is it alright if I let Lord Styra know? He is one of the Dread Masters, like Calphayus. He's trustworthy."

"If you deem it necessary. He does not seem like the sort to babble."

"I do. And he really isn't. I can't stay and help you find Heskal, but I can ask Styra to do so. You will be safe with him, and he knows Shyren, so he has a better chance at retrieving them. You can also tell him yourself if and when it's a good time."

Valkorion nodded. He really just wanted help getting Heskal back. As long as it was someone trustworthy, unlikely to reveal his identity to anyone, and capable of wrangling a Force-sensitive half beast, he didn't care who it was.

"So, if you're Valkorion, you probably know things about the Spire. The Alliance just launched a mission into a facility under the city. Supposedly there's a relay that transmits commands to the entire Eternal Fleet. Do you know anything?"

"I doubt I know anything not contained in whatever intel that alerted you to the frequency's existence. I was not exactly... present when the Spire was built."

"I understand. Let's go get Styra and I'll be off."

Bestia waited for Valkorion to put his mask and hood back on, obscuring his face. Then she practically dragged him to the lab, the most likely place to find Styra. He has built quite a friendship with Oggurobb the Hutt, bonding over their love for science and dubious morals. Styra was in the lab, luckily. He was standing over a table on which lay one of the local stalker beasts, its body open to reveal all of its guts. He nodded his head when he saw Bestia enter. His mask was on as it usually was around people outside family and Dread Guard. Rammas sat

on some crates a small distance away, watching. They both still wore the long black coats of Heralds of Zildrog.

"Who's the Scion?" Styrak asked, immediately glaring at Bestia's companion. Cael shrunk a little.

"You know Shyren? The beast Scion? They ran out to the woods because their Old God gift was acting up, Heskai went to look for them and didn't return. Could you help Cael here retrieve the two? I'd do it but I have a mission the Alliance wants me to be in and I have to go to Zakuul."

Styrak gave Bestia an alarmed look. He wasn't a fan of the constant excursions into the enemy's den, even though he was well aware Bestia could defend herself. He also wasn't exactly in the mood for hikes. In the end, he sighed.

"I'll assist them. Shyren is quite a fascinating specimen."

"Can I go too? I'm bored." Rammas asked. "I could help track them."

Bestia shifted restlessly. Her communicator beeped.

"Okay I really have to go now!" She pecked Styrak on the cheek before running off.

"Be careful!" Styrak called after her.

Cael watched her go, then shifted his wary gaze to the gigantic Dread Master and the extremely short Red Sith. Somehow she was giving him more creeps than Styrak. She turned to look back at him and he froze. Two black pits stared at him with faint red horizontal outlines of pupils. Panic choked him, and it took him a few moments to register Styrak shaking him gently.

"Are you going to faint?"

He pointed weakly at Rammas, who lowered her gaze.

"Tenebrae..."

Styrak tilted his head to the side.

"How do you know the name of Vitiate?" Styrak asked.

"I..." Cael looked around. Bestia ran off before telling her husband of his identity. The lab still had a few people milling around. "I will explain later. Not here."

"Alright. Let's go find the Chosen of Nahut before the sun sets. Likely Heskai won't be far away. The sooner we get there the sooner I can get back to my research."

"It's the eyes, isn't it?" Rammas asked grimly, hopping down from her perch and following Styrak as he limped towards the lab exit, almost dragging the Scion with him. "Feel free to think I'm the avatar of Zildrog or some shit. I'm not gonna eat you though. And no, I don't know why my eyes are like that."

Cael didn't answer, and throughout the walk towards the base exit, he avoided looking in her direction. It was a short, silent, and awkward walk as Cael led the two sith outside, and then pointed at a path leading away and into the woods.

"This is likely where both of them have headed."

Rammas bent down to look at the ground. Luckily, it had rained recently, and the ground was damp, meaning anyone passing through would leave tracks. And lucky for the three of them, both Shyren and Heskai chose to use the path, at least for now. Two sets of footprints led farther along.

"They've been here. Let's go," Rammas announced.

The group followed the prints in an uneasy silence. Rammas led the way, followed by Cael, and Styra brought up the rear.

"What did you want to tell us in the lab?"

Cael gave Rammas a suspicious side eye.

"She is as trustworthy as I am."

"She has the eyes of Tenebrae!"

"I'm, like, right here."

"My apologies."

Cael's shoulders slumped, making him look even more frail. He took off his mask and hood, turning to the two Sith. Styra and Rammas stared at him, and then exchanged glances. Cael groaned in exasperation when he saw that his face reveal had no effect on them.

"My name is not Cael. I am Valkorion, the fallen Emperor of Zakuul."

"Oh. Oh yeah I think I saw a broken statue or two around." Rammas piped up.

"Good riddance to those. It had never felt right to me to have statues of myself around."

"Who's Tenebrae?" Rammas asked.

"Someone who hurt me greatly. He had eyes like yours. I would rather not discuss it."

"I see. I'm sorry."

The Sith sounded genuinely apologetic. It slightly eased Valkorion's fear. Enough for him to feel bad for having been visibly hostile to her. After all, she likely had no control over her eye colour and structure. It wasn't her fault that he had horrible and terrifying associations connected to it.

"I apologize for reacting the way I did."

"It's okay. People are weird about my eyes all the time. I even wore yellow contacts for a while so they'd get off my case. They made my eyes irritated, and I stopped. And then I stopped caring."

"I see. So the prejudice against those who stand out is the same across the galaxy?"

"Yep. At least as a Sith I can stab people if they get on my case about being a weird runt with weird feet and weird eyes."

Cael hummed in response, unsure how to reply.

"They were probably jealous of the fact that I can climb better and flip birds with my feet."

Rammas proceeded to grab onto a low hanging branch and demonstrate the latter statement. The display of rude gestures drew a small chuckle out of the human.

"I'll fly up and see if I can spot them," Styrak offered.

Shadow wings opened behind Styrak's back, and he jumped up into the air. The base was set into a cliff, and the backdoor opened into a forested canyon. The sun was about to set, but the forest would be plunged into darkness even before that. Styrak scowled at the idea of prancing around the woods at night. With HIS injured leg, and with a human with his weak night vision in tow? He grumbled, surveying the openings between the trees, trying to spot anything promising. So far, he only saw glimpses of Rammas and the Scion below.

"I'll fly ahead." He spoke into the communicator. He saw Rammas raise hers to her mouth.

"Okay."

Rammas turned to Cael, who again flinched a little upon catching sight of her eyes.

"Lord Styrak is gonna scout ahead."

Valkorion nodded, and resigned himself to follow the odd Sith. This was going to be one awkward and uncomfortable hike. He wasn't even going to question the fact that Styrak had four shadow wings and reeked of death.

"Sooooo... do I refer to you as "your majesty" or can I keep talking to you like a regular person?"
"Neither of you are to speak a word of my identity to anyone. And, please, you can just keep calling me Cael. I have grown quite fond of the name."

"Can do. Don't worry about Lord Styrak either. He doesn't really talk to people much." She suddenly pointed to the ground. "Oh hey, more tracks."

They walked in silence for a while. Valkorion put the mask back on, and glanced up a few times, spotting Styrak soaring above the trees. The canyon was getting darker as the sun was dipping lower. Were the circumstances different, he would have enjoyed the walk. Especially if he could bring Heskai with him.

"You like Heskai a lot to be this worried for him."

"I do. I think... I might be in love," He sighed. "I have forgotten how it is to feel things for myself."

"What do you mean?"

"For a very long time, all of the choices were made for me, including who I could be with. I had no say in the matter."

"That sounds like the kind of bullshit noble families of my species and the Sith in general do. I'm sorry."

"I was with a woman before, and it was not my choice." The Scion's thin shoulders slumped as he walked. "She is a good person, very brave and forward, and, were things different, I might have approached her myself."

"I'm sorry." Rammas reached out to put a hand on his shoulder, but remembered the way he flinched when he first saw her, and decided against it.

Instead, she crouched down to study tracks on the ground. There were boot prints with a triangle design in the middle that were likely left by Heskai. They overlapped with a set of tracks that looked odd. The prints were shaped like bare human feet but most of the weight was focused on the toes area, as if the person was tip toeing. There were small indents next to the toes.

"Huh. Guess I'm not the only one with weird feet around. I'm sure these are the same tracks, but it looks like Shyren is running on their toes now? And they have claws?"

"They ran off because of the pain." Valkorion said gravely. "The gift of Nahut is not a merciful one. Most of them die. I am worried they may hurt Heskai in their anguish. Do you see his tracks?"

"Yeah there are boot prints, most likely him running after Shyren."

Rammas stood up and listened to the sounds of the forest around her. Normal sounds for a forest in the evening: insects chirping, birdsong, occasional animal cries. She started walking forward, Cael following.

"Shyren seems to like Heskai. And I mean really like." Rammas started after a while. "They talk about him a lot when we play hologames."

In the months following their arrival to Odessen, Rammas had befriended Shyren. They were one of the few people who didn't mind her odd appearance, or her being a Sith. Mostly because they didn't know what a Sith was, or didn't care. She introduced Shyren to her favourite hologames, and they often played them in their free time. And during that, Shyren would occasionally talk about their life. They weren't exactly forward about it, but from small clues Rammas gathered that they had feelings for Heskai.

"That is up to Heskai to decide. I cannot speak for Shyren, but I will respect his choices. And I hope so will they."

"Yeah. Let's hope we find them in one piece. Both of them."

The two of them followed the tracks for a while, until Rammas noticed a change in the background ambience. The forest has gone quiet. Eerily so. And in the distance, there were

new sounds: branches breaking, faint growling, and a single desperate shout that cut off abruptly.

"Up ahead," Rammas whispered. "We go quick and quiet."

To her surprise, Valkorion kept up with her despite his apparent age and the darkness. They moved silently through the undergrowth, hiding and peeking from behind trees to scout ahead until they came to a small clearing. Silence blanketed the empty space, but it was clear that there's been a scuffle recently. There were broken branches on a few shrubs, and a few scraps of black cloth littered the grass.

"They're gone. We're too late. Lord Styraak? Did you see anything?"

"Only a shadow disappearing below the trees. Moving North."

Rammas bent down to pick up the cloth scrap. A few drops of blood glinted on it. Valkorion let out a choked sound.

"Heskal..." he rasped.

"I don't think he's badly injured. It's just a few drops."

"But where has he gone?"

Rammas looked around and then noticed a path of dented dirt and grass leading deeper into the forest.

"Something was dragged here. Likely Heskal's body."

Valkorion raised a hand to his mouth even though it was hidden behind his mask. The old man looked utterly distraught.

"I mean unconscious body." She tried to reassure him. "Let me go check these tracks out."

Whatever took Heskal, he was probably in more danger than Shyren was. He was an injured older human who likely had no experience navigating the wilderness. Not that she had much of it, but her adoptive mother, and then the Sith Academy, and later Bestia insisted on teaching her some survival skills. While she preferred stone and concrete and metal forests to regular ones, she didn't feel completely out of her element.

Shyren likely didn't know much about wilderness survival either, but Shyren was younger and better at fighting, and had whatever beastly instincts gift of Nahut imparted them with. Moreover, chances were that Shyren was the one who'd dragged Heskal away, so if they found them, they'd find the other Scion too.

The sun dipped below the cliffs, and the forest quickly grew dark. It wasn't a problem for Rammas. She and Styraak could see in the dark, but Valkorion likely couldn't. And even with her night vision, it would be difficult to find anything. It was still far too quiet. Rammas moved forward. To her continuing surprise, Valkorion kept up with her.

"You can see in the dark?"

"Old Gods of Zakuul give us many blessings," Came a cryptic reply.

"Fine. Keep your secrets."

"The mask has rudimentary night vision functionality as well."

Night vision didn't save him from suddenly being yanked away into the darkness. Rammas shouted and leapt after him, igniting her lightsaber. Before she could do anything, something jumped on her back from above, tackling her to the ground. She was pinned, and her strength was no match for that of her assailant. Something hit her in the head. Last thing she saw before blacking out was a torn gold trimmed hem of a Scion robe.

Bestia grumbled as she followed Havoc Squad. Again. This time they were navigating a jungle of concrete and transparisteel instead of trees and beasts. She would rather be overseeing Kaliyo, but in the end the Alliance didn't trust her with access to the Gemini Frequency, and assigned her to the diversion team. Like Kaliyo could be trusted with these codes! Kaliyo was less trustworthy than any of the Dread Masters in her opinion. Bestia fumed. At least she'd have an outlet for her rage soon, and could do some property damage. And keep an eye on her son.

They had been sneaking around the city and Bestia planted the Dread seeds inside several generators and factories. Zakuul was still recovering from the damage to its electrical grid that Kaliyo had done. Doing more damage to it would plunge the city into darkness and cause chaos. Now, with all the seeds planted, they had to wait for the signal.

Rammas woke up in a bed. Why was she in bed? Was she back in the base? She shot up and reached for her communicator but found that it was gone. She panicked for a second. She was supposed to help Valkorion find the two Scions and instead she lost him too. What if he died out there? That would be a stupid death for the supposedly immortal emperor of Zakuul. And it would kind of be her fault.

Rammas dragged her palm down her face and looked around. She was inside what looked like a medbay. It looked beat up and cramped, nothing like the one at the base. A bandage was wrapped around her head and her wrist. Apparently whatever took her communicator tore it off so viciously that it slashed up her arm. Other than the pain in her wrist and a minor headache,

she felt fine. So she hopped off the bed and decided to explore her surroundings. The sooner she got her bearings, the sooner she would get out of here and find everyone.

Rammas stepped out of the medbay and found herself inside a spaceship of some sort. The medbay was in the back, and before her was a small hallway with stairs in the middle that led to an exit, and walkways around that led into the cockpit. It was dimly lit, and the walls were partly painted a faded green. Not an imperial ship then, those always had shiny dark grey walls and panels of small oblong lights, Rammas thought as she made her way to the cockpit. She tried all the doors along the way but they were locked.

There wasn't anything of note inside the cockpit. Rammas tried to poke around the navigation system, but all records inside it were erased, and the controls locked. She shrugged, and turned around to leave, but noticed a small locket resting on a surface by the wall. She picked it up and examined it. It contained an image of a human in his teens with long brown hair and dressed in a red jacket. Somehow the human was familiar, like Rammas had seen him around somewhere, but she wasn't sure. She put the locket down exactly where she found it and headed outside.

On the way down the steps, she spotted a datapad resting on a crate, and a backpack hanging on the wall. She picked up the datapad. It didn't even have a basic code lock on it. Rammas shook her head. The ship owner was probably out here alone for so long they've forgotten basic information security, or they simply didn't care. Rammas swiped around the datapad looking for any clues and to see if it was connected to the Holonet. It wasn't, but there were some notes stored in it. Rammas scanned through them. They were discussing Zakuul's culture of all things, and had transcripts of conversation the datapad owner had overheard, along with speculation on what it could mean, and thoughts on the Old Gods.

It still held no clue to the unseen saviour's identity, so Rammas set the datapad down and left the ship. It was parked on a flat cliff top facing the forest. A path ran away from the ship and disappeared down the hill to the Sith's left. A small stone circle sat at the beginning of the path. A campfire with a pot on it was set up to Rammas's right, and a neat stack of huge logs sat farther ahead. She walked up to the campfire, her stomach grumbling. She opened the lid of the pot and scrunched her nose at the vegetable smell.

The Sith then decided to explore the path and examine the logs on the way there. She didn't notice any heavy equipment that could be used to transport the logs, and the cuts on them looked burned. This one's likely a Force user, she thought. Armed with this knowledge, she snuck down the path cautiously. Somehow her lightsaber wasn't taken, and she gripped it tightly. The path turned around a cliff, and Rammas peaked from behind it. A fire was burning on the edge of a cliff, and someone was sitting by it with their back turned. Rammas crept closer.

"You're awake, child of Tenebrae." The stranger spoke calmly.

If someone told Bestia that she'd welcome the sight of Kaliyo over the holo, she would have laughed at them. But here she was, relief washing over her as Kaliyo reported that she was in position. Finally she'd get to do something. The members of Havoc Squad surrounded her, and she sat cross-legged and closed her eyes, sinking into deep meditation. Normally she would have breached the minds of sentients in a target area, but Zakuul had far too many droids for that to be effective. Instead, she focused on the Dread seeds she and Havoc had left around the city, and gave them the mental command: grow, consume, expand, destroy. For a few minutes, nothing seemed to have happened, but then a faint tremor shook the ground, and reports started coming in from the Havoc members stationed near the targeted structures. A holofeed was directed to Aric's communicator, and he watched in awe, horror, and disgust, as grey slimy tendrils enveloped one of the droid factories, grinding everything to a halt. Lights started going out in sections around the city. Emergency broadcasts could be heard faintly from the distance.

"Good job. I'm in." Came Kaliyo's smug voice.

"What." Rammas dropped the Force cloak. "This is the second time someone uses that name when talking to me today. What's going on? Who the kriff is Tenebrae?"

The stranger rose and faced Rammas. The Sith froze. Before her stood a pale woman with graying black hair in several haphazard braids, and blue eyes. She looked older than the holos Rammas remembered, but she was none other than the Grandmaster of the Jedi order, Satele Shan. And Rammas just poked around her belongings.

"Come. You probably are hungry."

Rammas lowered her lightsaber a bit. The Jedi was wary, but not hostile, and she probably wouldn't try to poison her. It wasn't the Jedi way. Her stomach growled again, and she felt faint. She decided to risk trusting the Jedi. For now.

"Yeah, I could really use some food..."

Rammas followed Satele to the campfire and sat down, watching her warily. Satele poured stew into a bowl, and handed it to Rammas. The Sith sniffed at it. This one had meat in it. She didn't wait for the Jedi to fix her own meal and started wolfing her portion down.

"How'd I end up here?"

"I found you unconscious in the forest. Your head was bleeding."

"Why did you help me? I'm a Sith."

"Jedi do not use every opportunity to kill." Satele explained patiently. "I admit I was tempted. There is a great darkness within you."

"Who's Tenebrae? What do I have to do with him?"

"Tenebrae is your Sith emperor."

"Oh. Must be an older name for him or something. I don't think I've ever heard him being called that. Everyone just calls him Vitiate or The Emperor."

This didn't really explain jack shit to Rammas. Only spawned more questions. Why did Valkorion invoke the name of the Emperor? What did Vitiate have to do with her? Did it have anything to do with the lack of memories she had up until she was about six years old?

"I see my explanation brought up more questions than answers."

"No shit, Grandmaster."

Satele rose up and walked towards the edge of the cliff. Rammas finished her stew and followed her.

"I'm afraid I don't have the answers you seek, but maybe your time here will result in something of use to your Alliance. I must admit, I didn't expect a Dread Master to make efforts to help the galaxy."

"Eh, most of it is Lana's idea. Lady Bestia just kinda goes along. She really doesn't hate the galaxy and wants Vitiate gone as much as everyone else does."

"I see."

"What do you mean by 'of use to the Alliance?'"

"A weapon that will help the Commander transcend the limits of light and dark, to stand on even ground with Arcann."

"Like, a lightsaber? But a fancy one?"

"You could put it that way. Maybe you will find answers in the Force while on this journey."

Damn Jedi and their cryptic bullshit. Rammas did her best to rein in the irritation she felt.

"Okay, tell me what I need to do."

The Jedi extended an arm, pointing to the woods on the other side of the canyon.

"Gather lightsaber components, then make your way to the source of the river. There will be a cave."

"Okay. Thanks for the food by the way."

"You're welcome."

Rammas faced the canyon, spotting a series of logs forming a sort of a bridge to the other side. She hopped from log to log and quickly crossed the canyon. From there, she followed a path marked by stacks of stones, and snuck past local wildlife. This was different to the trials she went through in the Sith Academy, where acolytes would be just told to go to a tomb and retrieve something, and if they died in the process, it wasn't the overseers' problem. This was a

hike compared to those trials. Literally, complete with paths helpfully marked with bonfires that Rammas lit to keep track of her progress.

It was night by the time Rammas collected all the bits and pieces that were left out for her. There was enough for two lightsabers, perfect for Bestia, who favoured dual wielding her weapons. Unlike Rammas, Bestia never really got used to the lightsaber spear she'd picked up on Zakuul, and never really had the time to get a regular lightsaber from the Force enclave. Rammas stopped at the mouth of a cave, a large lizard that had trailed after her now cowering behind her.

"I guess the cave doesn't pass the vibe check huh?" Rammas turned to the lizard. "It's okay. I'll be fine."

Rammas crouched, letting the Force hide her presence, and moved into the cave. It took a few moments for her eyes to adjust to the deeper darkness inside. She saw a ramp leading up to a ledge. There was something on that ledge, a vague figure in the dark. Alarms went off in her mind. Was this Satele? That would make sense. But why would she hide in the dark and not wait for her by the lightsaber forge below?

Rammas crept up along the incline, hugging the wall. The figure stood still, void-black against the dark alcove it was in. Rammas made her way to the top of the ramp, and saw that the figure was someone with floor-length shiny jet black hair. They were short, not much taller than Rammas, and had a frail build. Suddenly, they turned around and fixed Rammas with a stare. It was like she was looking in a messed up mirror. The person was a Red Sith man with the black eyes.

His face stretched and distorted into a reptilian snout, rows of teeth filling the maw, and Rammas was suddenly face to face with a giant serpent made of shadows. She jumped out of the way, activating her lightsaber. The serpent lunged at her again, and she jumped up and sliced through its neck. The body dissipated into nothing before it hit the floor, leaving Rammas staring, dumbfounded.

"What the fuck was that?!"

"A vision." A familiar voice said.

Rammas spun around.

"Did you do that?!"

Satele shook her head. "What you saw was brought up from the depths of your own mind. It wasn't my doing."

"That doesn't really narrow it down. I've never seen this guy in my life!"

It could be a lie. Rammas had a chunk of her childhood completely missing from her memory. She thought it was normal, but most people she talked to had at least fleeting memories. She had absolutely nothing up until she was found by her adoptive family. Not even the tiniest glimpse.

Things went to shit extremely fast. One moment Bestia and the Havoc Squad were hiding out near the entrance to the relay facility and monitoring Kaliyo's progress, and the next they were neck deep in skytroopers. Bestia was using one of them as a blunt weapon, whipping the droid around with telekinesis and sending many of its allies falling off the platform. Her holocom was blowing up with orders to retreat, and the group was slowly fighting their way through the droids.

Bestia saw one of the Havoc soldiers fall, their comrades dragging them away. She saw a blaster shot nearly hit her son. With a roar, she tore off a piece of a walkway from a level above, and sent it flying at the Skytrooper drop ship. It bought them enough time to run behind the building where a shuttle was already waiting for them.

"Kaliyo, get out, we need to retreat!" Lana yelled into the communication network.

Kaliyo ignored them. Koth and Senya exploded into incoherent cursing, not wanting Kaliyo on their homeworld a moment longer.

"We have no time to wait for her." Bestia shouted over Koth and Senya's angry yells. "We have to go!"

She waited until all the members of Havoc were in, then jumped into the shuttle, throwing another piece of walkway at the pursuing skytroopers. The hatch closed. They were going home.

"That went fucking well," Bestia grumbled.

Lightsaber parts floated above the crude forge as Satele and Rammas channeled the Force into them. Satele imbued the lightsabers with the light side, and Rammas with the dark. In the end the weapons were balanced in the Force, like the planet itself. Rammas levitated the silver crystals into their designated slots. The crystals could be swapped out later for whatever color Bestia liked, probably orange like her claw weapons had been. Parts slowly floated into place, and clicked. The two lightsabers landed into Rammas's outstretched hands. She clipped them to her belt and nodded at the Jedi.

"I don't know what this was about, but Bestia will probably love these."

"These weapons will help her bring down Arcann. And, hopefully, Emperor Vitiate too."

"I'm gonna take them to her right away then. Do you know the way to the base or have a map?"

"There's a pond nearby. If you go around it, there's a path leading up to the mesa the base is on." The Jedi suddenly froze, and looked over her shoulder. "I believe someone might be waiting for you there."

"Don't you wanna join the fight?"

"My fate lies elsewhere."

Rammas could do without the additional heaping of Cryptic Jedi Bullshit, but at least the directions were clear enough. She thanked the former Grandmaster, and scampered out of the cave as fast as it was polite. She didn't really care for any more visions. At least Bestia would get some cool lightsabers out of it.

The pond wasn't that far off, through a short cave passage. That one didn't dig into Rammas's psyche for any visions, thank the Force. It was a beautiful place, clear water cascading down the cliff and collecting in a small pool. Fireflies flitted through the air. Rammas stepped into the shallow water and looked over to the other side. A narrow path did, indeed, meander up the cliff and disappear out of view behind some plants.

Flapping of wings brought Rammas back to the real world. She looked up and grinned as she saw Styrak hovering above the pond.

"Hi lord Styrak! What'd I miss?"

"You've been gone for three days."

He flew over to the edge of the water, and looked Rammas over. He made a concerned noise at the bandages on her head.

"It's okay. It kinda stings, but I think it's gonna be okay. Can't be worse than the time a rakghoul tried to delete my face."

Styrak picked Rammas up easily, and flew up, clearing the cliff in moments.

"You will go to the medbay as soon as we land."

"Okay! I had the weirdest time out here. There's a fucking Jedi just camping out in the woods, and she sent me on one of their weird journeys, and now I have two lightsabers for Bestia."

Rammas paused to take a breath. "I also saw something in a cave that I really can't explain."

"Hm?"

"A Red Sith guy with hair that was, like, longer than his body, and black eyes. He turned into a big snake and attacked me, but then I cut him down and he disappeared. The Jedi said it was a vision."

Styrak didn't reply for a while.

"What you saw was Vitiate's original body. Although I do not recall him turning into snakes."

"Why would I see that?"

"I do not know. It could have to do with the gap in your memory."

Rammas watched the forest pass below them. The sky on the horizon was brightening into shades of pink.

"Anyway. Did you find Shyren? Are they okay? They didn't eat Heskai? I think they knocked me out for a while, and then the Jedi found me."

"I have seen the Jedi, yes. But I decided against approaching. The Scions are alright. I gave Shyren some painkillers and Force healing. Same with Heskai."

Rammas saw a spaceship drop out of hyperspace far above. A shuttle separated from it as Styak landed before the base's back entrance. The guards gave him uneasy looks. He set Rammas down, and they walked to the lab. Shyren sat on a bed, with Heskai resting in a bed next to them, and Cael fretting around him. Shyren looked more beastly than Rammas remembered, with black fur covering their arms and starting to sprout on their jaw. Their legs looked twisted, transformed into clawed beast paws, and were also covered in black fur. They waved at Rammas.

"Hey." they rasped. "I'm sorry I knocked you out."

"It's alright. I'm gonna go get my head looked at, and we can hang out more after."

Bestia watched as exhausted soldiers spilled out of the shuttle. They dragged several stretchers with them that contained the bodies of those who didn't make it. Bestia gritted her teeth. This could have been avoided if they didn't wait for Kaliyo to return their holocalls until the last possible moment. It could have been avoided if she went with Kaliyo and kept her in line. But then, she wouldn't be there to help protect Havoc Squad, and they'd have even more casualties. Her son could have been one of those casualties. All in all, it was a failure.

She stomped towards the War Room. Someone had to deliver the reports.

Chapter End Notes

Cael and Valkorion are the same character and the names are used depending on the point of view character of the moment.

Also:

Flipped bird count: 7

Common Ground

Chapter Summary

Bestia makes new friends and regains some old ones.

Chapter Notes

Recommended listening for the droid factory segment: Berserk OST - Aria by Susumu Hirasawa

"So that went exceedingly well." Bestia remarked, grim sarcasm oozing from her tone. "Kaliyo decided to fuck off at the worst possible moment, and Havoc got nearly slaughtered."

She leaned onto the command table, looking over the meager gathering. Theron's holo was glaring at her. Aric was busy arranging funerals for the fallen Havoc members, so Bestia offered to report in his stead. Senya was pacing off to the side, her arms crossed and a frown on her face. Lana and Scorpio stood by the table opposite of Bestia.

"The casualties could have been much worse if you weren't there." Lana said.

"I wish I could be inside the facility keeping tabs on Kaliyo but I guess I can't be in two places at once. At least I got to do some property damage."

"I have information regarding the Gemini network." Everyone turned to Scorpio. "Each Eternal Fleet ship has a mechanical captain linked to the network. They cannot be directly subverted."

"Why?" Bestia crossed her arms, glaring at the droid.

"Because they were based on me. I do not know how they came to exist, but I will not be imitated."

"You could sue them for copyright infringement," Theron chimed in.

"The captains are produced from a template: Gemini Prime. I have located the factory the unit resides in. It is located on the planet Darvannis."

Bestia flinched a little at that name. It was where Styraak fell. Tired of the Dread Masters' constant blunders, Styraak had tried to take the matters into his own hands. He chose Darvannis because of all the resources and people gathered there for a huge underworld auction. Styraak wanted to corrupt all of them with a massive Sith Alchemy ritual and come back to Oricon with a huge army and a pile of wealth and weapons.

However, the Empire and the Republic learned of it somehow, and sent in a joint team of their strongest. The group swept through the city, found Styraak, and fought him to the death. The only reason he came back was the loyalty of his surviving apprentices. They sacrificed themselves to conduct a ritual that pulled Styraak from the other side. And now Bestia was going to the world that almost claimed her husband's life.

"So, you want someone to steal that particular unit."

"Yes, very perceptive. Retrieve it, and I will decode the Gemini Frequency from its databanks."

"Senya, can you tell us anything?"

"Darvannis was one of the first worlds we conquered. The facility is a key factory that produces droids, weapons and starships. So it's secured accordingly."

"Let me guess. We'll need a fucking army that we don't have."

"We have three ancient Sith lords." Theron pointed out.

"Sending Styraak to the place where he pretty much died is out of the question, unless you want a Force storm that will take out EVERYTHING. And turn Darvannis into another Dromund Kaas." Bestia snapped. "Also, as much as I hate to point it out, our powers are useless against droids. Unless someone develops a virus that teaches them to feel fear, we're pretty much just regular Sith folks against Zakuul. I'm still willing to go though."

"And you will. I've found some possible allies on the planet. They want to meet the one in charge of the Alliance."

"Who are they?"

"I can't say much, but they have skill and firepower, and they won't stab us in the back. They're more of a "shoot you in the face" type."

"I see. I have a feeling I will like them. We should prepare the Gravestone for combat. Once we get that droid, we can take the fight to the Eternal Fleet."

With that, the meeting was concluded. Bestia found Styrak and Rammas waiting for her in a hallway outside the War Room. Rammas walked up to her, and unclipped something from her belt. She held it up to Bestia to see: two lightsabers with golden hilts etched with curving dark stripes.

"Where'd you get these?" Bestia picked up one of the hilts, weighing it in her hand.

"Eh, long story. A Jedi found me in the woods and had me make these for you. She said they'll help defeat Arcann." Rammas shrugged. "I kinda modified the hilts and put in orange crystals though."

"These are wonderful!" Bestia held the lightsaber up, and activated it. A fiery orange blade hissed to life. Bestia gave it a few swings.

"Thank you. Who was this Jedi?"

"Satele Shan."

"Wait, the Grandmaster of the Jedi order?"

"Yep. Camping out in the woods as a hermit."

"She could join the alliance."

"I asked. She said her fate isn't here."

Rammas rolled her eyes at the memory, then turned to leave.

"I'm gonna go visit Shyren."

Styrak lingered around after Rammas had left.

"There's more to her story. She mentioned having a vision of Vitiate's original form in a cave during the journey the Jedi sent her on."

"They do have the same eyes. You think they're connected?"

"I don't know." Styrak said. "Do you remember the tests I carried out shortly after we were freed? You and Raptus were the closest matches. But there's also this unidentified part."

"Yeah and I said that I wouldn't have fucked Raptus in a thousand years. Not to mention we were both in stasis at the time of her birth."

"What I'm saying is, they could be connected. We know nothing about Raptus's background. He just showed up when Vitiate gathered us to be shipped off to Oricon for the first time. But it could also be a mutation or a throwback trait like in Vitiate himself."

"You think she could be some sort of sleeper agent sent by Vitiate? Like his Children of the Emperor project?"

Styrak shrugged his great shoulders.

"That is a possibility we should account for."

"Eh, I don't want to judge someone based on what their possible ancestors are like. She's a good kid. And you've pretty much adopted her."

Styrak hummed and nodded. Bestia couldn't see his face under his mask, but was sure he was smiling a little.

"I suppose I have."

The preparations for the mission took several days. Time that Bestia used to rest and recharge, find out some information about the planet, and train with her new lightsabers. They really did feel like an extension of her body. Bestia wouldn't be caught off guard with an unwieldy lightsaber spear anymore. Which was good, considering she wouldn't have Styak around to save her on this mission.

Darvannis, Hutt space. The shuttle had trouble landing due to strong winds, but eventually it connected lopsidedly with the landing pad. Bestia was the first to hop out, and was nearly knocked down by the wind, but managed to right herself. Squinting, she looked around. They landed on the edge of a city filled with rounded sand-colored buildings that had tiny windows. A gap in the walls led into a yard, and beyond that, was a maze of streets. Bestia looked in the other direction, and saw a blank desert with a few thin palm trees bending in the wind.

"So this is the world that claimed my husband's life? I expected something more impressive..."

Theron didn't reply. He turned around and walked into the city. Bestia followed him. They walked until they ended up in a plaza. Several tents stood around the edges, proudly decorated with banners of various clans. People in armor walked around. A larger tent dominated one edge of the plaza, with a tusked skull hanging above the entrance. It was the one Theron led Bestia to. Two guards stood at the door, they nodded at Theron and let them pass.

Inside was a large central room, flanked by two wings. The wings were filled with rows of bunk beds and footlockers. The central room had a holo table, similar to the one back at the base, but slightly smaller. Several armored people stood around it, staring at a woman with shoulder length red hair.

"You secured contact with the Mandalorians." Bestia said, impressed.

Mandalorians were an interspecies gathering of warriors, recognized by their distinctive armor, united by a common culture, and led by a code of honour. Usually consisting of scattered clans and mercenaries acting on their own, sometimes Mandalorians united under a singular leader. It looked like Bestia was witnessing one such occasion. She wondered what brought them to Darvannis. Mandalorians usually sought out challenging opponents to fight, and Darvannis was an out of the way world. There was no Dread Master for them to tackle here anymore. Aside from herself, but she came to try and forge an alliance against Zakuul.

A man with tan skin and a close-cropped mohawk of hair fixed Bestia with a stare.

"You're on the wrong world, Sith. Belsavis prison is on the other end of the galaxy!" He laughed at his own joke.

Bestia simply glared right back at him, letting some of her power loose. The man flinched, but stood strong.

"Shut up, Khomo. I've heard of you, Dread Master. Shae Vizla. Mandalore the Avenger."

"Bestia. Dread Master." Bestia stuck her clawed hand out for a handshake. Shae shook it.

"I take it the Mandalorians have no love for Zakuul?"

"The bastards scattered our clans. What remains stands with Mandalore the Avenger."

"Nice title. How'd you come by it?"

"My clan did better than most in the past years. I ended up in charge mostly by accident."

"I can relate." Bestia sighed, and rolled her eyes. "I set out to avenge my family and take down the sith emperor and now I'm stuck leading the rebellion like some goody-two-shoes Chosen One from some kids' story."

"That's quite a tale. Is your fighting as good as your Force powers?"

"Oh, it is. I've had plenty of practice beating up droids, considering my fear powers are useless against them."

"Good. We have assault teams hammering at the factory. Make yourself useful and disable the perimeter guns." She looked somewhere behind Bestia. "Torian!"

A young human stepped up. He had short blond hair and crescent scars on his cheeks. Seemed like some sort of ritual scarring.

"Mand'alor." He said respectfully.

"Torian will show you the way. He's the best scout we got."

Bestia nodded at Torian.

"My name is Bestia. Just point me at the enemy."

"Guns are in sector six. I'll try to protect you."

Bestia burst out laughing.

"I think I'll be the one protecting, but thanks all the same. We Dread Masters are pack beasts, after all. Maybe even to our own detriment."

Torian gave her a look.

"I've heard that this world is where one of your kind fell."

Bestia let out a sigh as the two walked to the speeders parked at the edge of the camp.

"He didn't stay dead for long, but his fall did a lot of harm to us. One of the reasons I came out here. Wanted to see the world that killed my husband. Can't say I'm impressed, but I don't know what I expected. The other reason is that I want Zakuul gone as much as everyone else does. They destroyed my home."

"I see. Our heartworlds were taken by Zakuul." Torian said.

"I hope they weren't bombed like Oricon was."

They mounted the speeders and rode out into the city. They weaved through streets, dodging Zakuulan patrols until they made it towards the first gun emplacement. It was inside a building on top of a hill with a winding walled path leading up to it.

"Time to test my new lightsabers on some real targets." Bestia said, eyeing the Skytroopers patrolling the perimeter of the building. "Cover my back."

She grabbed her weapons, orange blades coming to life, and leapt forward. The Skytroopers didn't even have time to register what hit them as Bestia sliced one vertically into three pieces, and then spun around and cut down a turret that aimed at her. She saw a blaster bolt hit another Skytrooper in the head from the corner of her eye.

"Damn, these lightsabers are good."

Bestia and Torian fought their way up the path and inside the building, where Bestia stood guard while Torian reprogrammed the gun. When they exited, Bestia looked up and saw the gun pointed towards the huge looming tower of the droid factory.

They fought through to the other two gun placements without much incident. However, when Torian leaned over the controls of the final gun, a burst of transmissions came from his

communicator. The guns were ready to fire, but there still was a group of Mandalorians trapped inside the factory. If the guns were to fire now, they'd get caught in the blast, but so would the factory. Bestia watched Torian consider the options, a deep frown on his face.

"These are your people. It should be your decision. I'd divert one of the guns to clear a path for them. Let them fight another day."

"There's no honor in running away. Besides, it would mean less damage to the factory."

He keyed in the command. All three guns pelted the factory, engulfing it in flames. The ride back was silent.

They reconvened in the command center. A holo of the factory in flames floated above the table.

"We reprogrammed the guns." Bestia said. "The factory is damaged, and the shields should be down."

"And our losses?"

"Twenty eight seasoned Mandalorian warriors." Replied Khomo, the man who tried to snap at Bestia previously. "How valiantly they fought against the spawn of production line fifteen alpha!"

Acrid sarcasm dripped off his mocking eulogy. Torian frowned at him.

"Don't mock the dead." Bestia said. "Unless you want to be haunted."

"You're no Mandalorian, but you pulled your weight." Shae said. "We'll plan our next move in the morning. For now, we celebrate survival and victory."

Bestia thought celebrating in the wake of their allies' death was odd, but decided against saying anything. Maybe it was the Mandalorian way of honouring the fallen.

"Let's see how you handle Mandalorian drink."

"I drank stuff that would probably kill a regular person. Bring it on!"

The celebration was, indeed, a way to honour the fallen. While the bodies couldn't be retrieved, the Mandalorians deemed the burning factory a fitting funeral pyre. At first, Bestia stood awkwardly to the side, but then someone challenged her to a brawl, and she found herself inside a ring of shouting and cheering people, faced off against a masked stranger. Shrugging, she summoned her own mask and assumed a battle stance.

"No claws!" The Mandalorian said. "And no Force powers."

"Alright. We fight till one of us is knocked down."

Bestia charged forward, going for the opponent's midsection. For her, the best defence was offence, for better or for worse. She also didn't exactly need Force powers to scare someone. Being charged by a really tall, really beefy person would make most people flinch. Not this one, though. The Mandalorian stepped to the side, avoiding the hit. Bestia spun around and moved behind her opponent. Before they could react, they were lifted up and thrown to the side. The crowd cheered.

Several more people lined up to fight Bestia, and one even managed to knock her down. It seemed like Bestia's displays of strength warmed the hearts of the Mandalorians, and soon she was sharing stories and drinking with them. In the end, Bestia passed out, exhausted but content.

She woke up with a mild headache. Those drinks must have been strong to get through her Sith Alchemy reinforced defences. She grumbled, re-did her hair into a long braid, and joined Shae and others at the command table.

"Hangover?" Khomo ribbed.

"A bit. Must have been some drinks." She looked over at the table. "What are we dealing with?"

"Power stations and a tactical outpost in the way. If we disable the stations, we can move on to the factory."

"I'd give a lot for an actual opponent to fight." Khomo grumbled.

"Same. Like a big beast to wrangle or something. In the meantime, I could take the outpost. How big is it?"

"You're going to take on a battalion alone? Brave, but not very bright."

"I never claimed to be the brightest lightsaber in the bunch." Bestia shrugged. "Torian can vouch for my ability to cleave through metal, though."

Shae leveled a doubtful look at Bestia, but nodded.

"It's not a very big outpost. You holding the droids off would give the clans time to reach the power stations..." she mused. "I will trust you on this. "

Bestia was given coordinates, and left the meeting, walking to stand outside the camp. Torian would be accompanying her on this mission too, but for now she was alone. Her holocom beeped.

"Lana. What is it?" Bestia asked.

"Theron has procured schematics of the droid factory. They're incomplete, but they should help in planning."

"I sense a "but" coming."

"I have concerns about our new allies. Mandalorians tend to value war and challenge above all else. They're opposing Zakuul now, but when it's gone..."

"You could say the same about me and my family."

There was an awkward silence.

"I have found a lot in common with them. I won't betray their trust."

She could see Lana's expression change to a frown.

"You must think about the galaxy. This arrangement will not last."

"I "must" nothing, Lana. I'm already thinking about the galaxy by trying to rid it of Vitiata. I'll do as much as necessary to achieve that goal. Beyond that, I simply don't care as long as me and the Dread Masters are left alone. If it doesn't last, then so be it. Just send me the damn schematics. I'll contact you when I have the droid."

Bestia cut off the communications, and kicked at a withered palm frond at her feet, sending it flying. Now on top of having a headache she was pissed. She paced around fuming until she saw Torian emerge from the camp.

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah." Bestia did her best to erase the scowl off her face. "Let's go."

The outpost was a series of winding corridors. Droids were spat out by side tunnels and swarmed the place, but they stood no chance against Bestia's need to vent her anger. They were cut down, and the side gates wrecked with broken droids piled up to the ceiling. Finally, they made it to a control room and Torian started typing away at a console while Bestia stood guard.

"I overheard your call. Your friend thinks we're animals. We're not. We're warriors."

"I don't agree with her on everything. I'd wager that deep down she sees me as a dangerous beast too."

"Then I shouldn't have said anything."

"We should report to the camp."

The mood back in the camp was cheerful, especially compared to when Bestia just arrived.

"Well done, all of you. We will march on the factory within the hour."

"There's a droid within it that I need to grab. It holds the key to the eternal fleet."

"We're after weapons, not droids." Khomo said. "Just imagine: us with all these weapons, smashing apart the siege on our homeworld!"

"You can dream of glory later. Go, prepare the clans!" Shae snapped at him. She leaned on the table, looking tired. "Half the time I struggle simply keeping my people together."

"At least they're your people. I'm stuck in a position I didn't ask for, leading several different factions, all of which have a warrant for my arrest and likely execution. Fun times."

"Looks like you've got quite a challenge on your hands. Come, let me show you the battle plan."

"Oh yeah, speaking of. My people sent me partial schematics of the droid factory."

"This is much better!"

Bestia followed Shae outside. The Mandalore climbed on top of a stack of crates, and Bestia listened to her speech. Her people cheered, and roared when she was done.

Bestia rode at the head of the small army, clashing with the droids alongside the Mandalorians. Among the chaos, she and Torian made their way up the tower. The defences inside were minimal compared to all the droids crowded outside. The two wrecked production lines as they went, carving a veritable path of destruction through the factory and, probably, through Zakuul's budget.

Finally, they made it to the topmost level. It was a huge room with several elevators leading to an upper level. And there, opposite of the entrance, Bestia saw the final prize: a skinny humanoid droid floating in an open glass tube, with countless cables connecting to it. The droid looked a little like Scorpio with the same face and halo, but whoever designed it decided against giving it a weirdly feminine shape Scorpio had.

"So that's your droid?" Torian asked.

"Yep. Now to climb up there and wait till a contact on my side slices into it."

A faint sound came from behind them. Metallic footsteps. Far too many of them. The two turned around to face a horde of droids bearing down on them. It looked like they had a long fight ahead of them.

Some time later, Bestia and Torian stood on top of a growing pile of skytroopers, with more and more surrounding them. Bestia struggled to deflect blaster bolts with her lightsabers, and Torian's shield was running out of power. Was this how it was going to end? Overrun by

machines? Bestia sneered. Khomo Fett was right, dying by droids was a stupid way to go, unworthy of both a Dread Master and Mandalorian.

Suddenly, sparks fell from above, landing on top of the droids, and Bestia chanced a look up towards the ceiling. A cyan lightsaber blade was almost done cutting a circle in the facility ceiling. With one final flourish, the cut section groaned and dropped down, crushing several skytroopers and drawing their attention away from Bestia and Torian. A figure stood on top of the circle, with its back to Bestia. The stranger spun around, the giant lightsaber in their hands cutting a dozen skytroopers in half. Black wings spread behind their back, and glowing eyes bore into Bestia's. Torian aimed his weapon at the stranger, but Bestia forced it down.

"Hi mom." Sharack said simply. A large black and gold droid charged at her, but she simply kicked at it with one of her cybernetic legs.

And suddenly, the droids stopped. Bestia watched, her mouth agape, as their eyes went dark and their arms fell limply to their sides. The screens on the upper level flickered and glitched out, text and data in Zakuulan replaced with a triangular logo made of sharp blades. She hasn't seen this symbol in a long while. Not since she had left Oricon, for it was the Dread Masters' coat of arms.

"We are right on time," A deep feminine voice spoke over the communication system.

"Sharack? Brontes?!"

"Hey, don't forget me." Another voice cut in, a very deep and rumbling one.

"Tyrans?!"

"Who could ever forget you, brother?" Bestia could hear the eye roll in the tone of Brontes's voice. "You are after the Gemini unit, correct? Your path should be clear, and we can assist you in extracting her. Then, we can gather in person once you return to your base."

"Where have you assholes been? I could have used your help about two weeks ago!" Bestia yelled as she trudged towards the elevator.

She stepped out onto the upper level, a long platform that circled around the entire room. Cables ran all over the walls and ceiling towards one point: a capsule with a humanoid figure floating inside. Sharack followed her. Now that they had a moment of peace, Bestia could sense how warped Sharack's presence had gotten. It felt unnatural, like it wasn't supposed to exist.

Styrak felt the same way, as well as the Dark Side beasts that spawned from the Force itself back on Ziost. Bestia decided to not linger on it for the moment.

"We have been in hiding." Brontes said. "Sharack is a bit of a later addition to our team."

"There's so much I want to talk about, but we have a droid to retrieve." Bestia turned to Sharack. "Just, promise you won't disappear?"

"I won't." Sharack stepped up to the capsule and reached towards the droid. "So, do we just tear it out?"

"No!" Brontes sounded almost frantic, but quickly regained her composure. "We do not tear the unit out of its capsule. We carefully unplug her when I'm finished overriding her protocols."

"Got it." Sharack moved away from the droid. The screens next to the droid started glitching out, and an alarm went off.

"Good news: Brontes is in. Bad news: there's a fuckton of skytroopers converging on your location, and your Mandalorian friends are pulling out. Take the Gemini unit and go." Tyrans announced.

Bestia and Sharack scrambled to unplug the cables connecting Gemini to the facility. Sounds of shooting came from downstairs. Sharack dropped the cables.

"I'll help hold them off." She vaulted over the railing. The droids were no match for her, even in their numbers.

Gemini twitched and slumped over when Bestia disconnected the last cable. She hoisted the droid over her shoulder and peered into the level below.

"I got the droid!"

"And I have located the self destruct codes for this facility," Brontes's voice dripped with cheerful venom. "I suggest you and the Mandalorian vacate the premises."

Bestia jumped over the railing, the Force cushioning her fall, and ran towards the exit. Sharack flew past, Torian held under one arm, and a heavy piece of machinery levitated by the other, acting like a battering ram and clearing the path.

Explosions thundered out soon after the group cleared the exit. Sharack dropped Torian into his speeder and took the deactivated droid. She kept up with Bestia and Torian as they made their escape, the droid factory crumbling into flames and smoke behind them.

The camp met them with celebration. Huge crates full of weapons now lined the edges of the camp, with Mandalorians going to and fro with new guns in hand. Bestia stumbled into the command tent.

"You two look like osik."

"We just fought through like a hundred droids. We got the one I needed though. And I suddenly reunited with some allies of mine."

Shae looked past Bestia, and the Red Sith turned to see what she was staring at. Sharack stood at the entrance, Gemini still held under one arm. She waved at Shae and gave her a toothy grin.

"Hi, Torch!"

"Sharack Snow. The one even death can't hold back."

"You two know each other?" Bestia asked.

"Remember the whole thing with Revan and his cult bringing Vitiate back to power?"

"Yeah?"

"I met Shae while investigating. We fought on top of a volcano!"

"And then I assisted Sharack in a fight against Revan."

Revan was a legendary figure, a Force user who was both Jedi and Sith. The Sith emperor held them captive for several centuries, and Bestia remembered Raptus gloating about tormenting them. Then Revan was freed by a Republic team and disappeared, only to re-emerge years later at the head of a huge cult. The cult manipulated both sides of the galactic conflict, and the

whole chain of events culminated in Revan bringing the Sith Emperor Vitiate back to almost full strength. Which, in turn, led to the destruction of Ziost. Which, in turn, started the entire journey Bestia was currently on. She groaned at the realization.

"The factory is mostly online, and we have new weapons for the first time in years."

"Thank your spy when you see him. He brought the glory days back."

Shae shook her head.

"Blast it. I won't be able to stop them from starting up some sort of a neo-crusade. They'll want to fight more than droids."

"I understand." Bestia said. "How about, once Zakuul is dealt with, you help me hunt down a god?"

"That emperor of yours?"

"Precisely."

"I'll definitely consider it. In the meantime, I think your alliance could use a representative of the clans."

Bestia nodded. The hum of ship engines came from the outside.

"Looks like our ride back is here. Welcome aboard, kid."

Torian, Bestia, and Sharack exited the tent. A shuttle with a faded Zakuul insignia on its tail sat on the landing pad.

"Goodbye, Darvannis, I guess." Bestia said as they all piled in.

Everyone took their seats, and for a while, no one spoke as the ship took off. After a while, Bestia shifted in her seat, and looked at Sharack. The Jedi sat slightly to the side in the opposite row of seats, her cybernetic legs taking up the entire aisle.

"What happened?" Bestia asked, and after that, more questions poured from her. "Where have you been? How are you...?"

"Alive?"

"Yes. You were on Ziost when..." Bestia shut her eyes, trying to prevent herself from tearing up at the memory. When she spoke again, her voice was full of pain. "When Vitiate devoured it. I felt you *die*."

"I did. But also I didn't. I'm not sure what happened, but I woke up after a while. And I was like this." Sharack held up one of her arms.

The arm was covered in dark grey scales that roughly followed the flow of muscle fibers. Bestia stared at it, and then recognition sparked in her mind.

"Styrak has scales like these on his right arm and leg."

"You mean we're, like, both the same undead thing?"

"I think so."

"Brontes said the same thing." Sharack rubbed the back of her neck. "Man, this is ironic. I led half the group that killed him. Now I'm the same thing as him. And I never got to apologize properly."

"He's back at the base, so you have that chance now."

"I guess." Sharack shrugged. "So after I woke up, I wasn't really myself. I was numb and angry, and the only thing that mattered was tracking down Vitiate. I just kinda flew off into space, not thinking much. I can exist in space now. And then Zakuul ships showed up. They managed to knock me out, and when I woke up, I had Force suppression shackles on."

"I saw you in the throne room."

"Yeah. I was still not really there. Just, laser focused on getting to Vitiate, and here he was. The motherfucker. The tool. Right fucking there inside that old guy."

"Then Marr set us free and you stabbed him."

"I think the dude he was hijacking wanted him gone as much as I did."

"I bet he did."

"For a moment, I think he took control back and asked me to do it. So I did. Ran him through, and Vitiate exploded out and escaped. I flew after him, but I lost track of him."

"What did you do after? I was stuck in carbonite for five years, then Lana found me."

"Oh, shit, Lana's here too? This is gonna be awkward. I kinda broke up with her. Thought she wouldn't wanna be with a monster. I drifted around for a while. Eventually, I started to sorta feel like myself again, and decided to try and return to the Jedi. Except, by the time I did..."

"There wasn't really a Jedi order to return to?"

Sharack nodded, her ears lowered.

"Yeah. Coruscant was blockaded, and the Jedi were scattered. I don't know if they'd even accept what I've become. Some of them struggled to accept my species even after I literally beat the shit out of the Sith Emperor. I couldn't even contact my former master. So I went back to drifting and eventually Brontes found me and I've been with her and Tyrans since. Maybe I should ask them to find master No'ree. Just, to know if she's okay or not."

"Will you join the Alliance?"

"Sure. Seems like the only way to get to Vitiate is to get Arcann out the way. Annoying little man." Sharack grumbled.

"That, he is. I found Seid a bit ago on Zakuul."

"He's okay?" Sharack perked up. "I never got to talk to him after Ziost..."

"He is. I didn't really talk to him much though."

In truth, Bestia mostly didn't know how to approach her son. He had chosen to maintain a bit of distance from both her and Styrak, being Force-blind and wary of his sith parents. With the twins located, that left only one of Bestia's offspring unaccounted for: Mu'hass, her eldest. Bestia only knew that he escaped with Styrak and Rammas, but later on split off on his own. He'd be fine, Bestia thought, trying to soothe her worry. He's a grown man and a Sith, and he had a level head, meaning he wouldn't take unnecessary risks. He'd turn up eventually, or Brontes and Tyrans could track him down.

As soon as they landed, Sharack hopped out, carrying the droid towards the base entrance. Bestia ambled after her. An alarm blared, causing Bestia to grumble and reach for her lightsabers. She was exhausted, and there was sand in far too many places, and she was looking forward towards a shower and not another fight. Someone shouted, pointing up. A wedge-shaped vessel revealed itself in the air above Odessen. It was painted a faded red, and sharp white designs ran along its underbelly. A hatch opened and two small figures flew towards the ground.

"Do not attack!" Bestia shouted in her most commanding voice. "They are on our side!"

Confused and angry stares were aimed her way, but no one fired. The descending shapes drew closer, turning out to be two people in red robes and golden crested masks. They both wore bladed cybernetic wings. They landed in front of Bestia, the wings folding neatly behind their backs, and Bestia pulled both of them into a hug.

"Hey." The taller one said.

"Hey Tyrans. I see you assholes still love to make an entrance."

"Yep." Tyrans sounded decidedly smug.

"Hello to you too." Brontes freed herself from Bestia's hug. "I would like to see the Gemini unit."

"You'll have to contend with Scorpio, but I got a feeling you two will get along. Let's head inside."

They met Lana at the base entrance. She frowned at the sudden arrivals.

"More Dread Masters?"

"Yep." Tyrans and Bestia said in unison, and then chuckled.

"Do not worry. With us here, there is only one Dread Master left unaccounted for." Brontes reassured. Lana didn't look convinced.

"Raptus." Bestia rolled her eyes.

"I don't think he'll be joining us. Even we couldn't trace him. Bastard just disappeared."

"Eh, good riddance."

Lana led them all to the command table. Sharack sat in a chair watching Scorpio pick at a port on the back of Gemini's neck. She turned to look at the new arrivals, and beamed when she saw Brontes. Brontes in turn walked right to the droids. Tyrans sat on a smaller holotable by the wall that wasn't in use, and Lana took her place at the head of the table.

"I believe we both have quite a lot to report."

Chapter End Notes

Osik means "shit" in Mando'a.

This was a surprisingly fun chapter to write and there's a surprising amount of common ground between Bestia and the Mandalorians.

Also a fun bit of lore that I wanted to include but couldn't find a way to do so organically: the celebration where Bestia suplexes a person is a Mandalorian death ceremony. The only outsider to be honoured with one was actually a female sith lord named Raze who fought off many Jedi and died fighting.

Deception

Chapter Summary

Bestia and friends try to hijack an eternal fleet vessel. It goes about as well as it could.

Chapter Notes

From the gameplay standpoint, Gemini Deception can eat my entire ass. I did my best to cut down all the sections that are literally just running around poorly lit corridors.

"And then Gault says: time for plan C. And I ask: what's plan C? And he goes: we jump." Mu'hass made an agitated theatrical flourish with one hand. He was a Sith by species, with dark orange skin, black hair in a dreadlock bun, and yellow eyes. There was a white patch of skin and hair on his forehead. He wore a long light orange coat with short sleeves, and cargo pants. A vertical scar crossed his right eye.

Mu'hass sat at a table in the base cantina, surrounded by his family. Even the largest table wasn't quite enough for six fairly large Sith, and one tiny one. Bestia and Styrak, his parents, sat side by side next to him. Bestia was wolfing down a huge steak in front of her, and Styrak kept glancing at everyone around. Seid and Sharack, his younger siblings, sat opposite them, with Sharack hogging most of the space under the table. The remaining space, opposite Mu'hass, was occupied by Calphayus and Rammas. Rammas was perched on a borrowed barstool. Calphayus was fussing over a tea kettle in the center of the table. If it weren't for Mu'hass regaling them with his story, it would have been an awkward gathering.

"So, while I was suplexing Mandalorians in the name of making allies, you were dragged out of hiding because a friend of a friend of a friend needed muscle and slicing for a scheme to rob Zakuul blind?"

"Pretty much." Mu'hass said. "Now I'm gonna offer my slicing skills to the Alliance here and hopefully not have any more adventures."

He took a big gulp of tea from his mug. One of the blends Calphayus had cooked up. Black tea mixed with local Odessen herbs.

"We're almost like a normal family right now." Seid noted. "I mean other than people giving us a huge berth because three of us are ancient Sith Lords who threatened to destroy the galaxy."

"And a death god." Sharack chuckled. "Sometimes a family is three Dread Masters, an undead aberration, a tiny little sith with a mysterious past, and two dudes who just want to chill."

"I want a peaceful life, too." Calphayus said.

"And so do I, to be honest." Bestia agreed. "Enough to try and fight what amounts to a god in a galactic parking lot. I'm glad we're all here."

Now that both her blood family was gathered in one place, and her found Sith family was mostly accounted for, Bestia felt much more confident in her chances of defeating Zakuul. With them out of the way, she and the Dread Masters would track down Vitiate and then... She paused. She hadn't really considered an actual strategy. But that's what they had Tyrans for. They'd cross that bridge when they got there.

Most Sith Lords were extremely solitary and individualistic, trusting no one but themselves. They only formed temporary alliances that ended in betrayal. The Dread Masters broke that mold by being a team that was strongest when all six were present. Every Dread Master had their individual strengths that they contributed to the team. Bestia was the fighter, Brontes was the engineer, Calphayus could see into the future, Tyrans was the strategist, and Styrak was a master of Sith Alchemy. That left the rancor in the room. Or rather, the absence of one: Raptus. He was as part of the Force union as the other five but he remained a mystery even almost a thousand years later. His main strength was his persuasion ability. Bestia didn't miss him, but had to admit his way with words could be extremely useful to secure new allies against Zakuul.

"Does anyone know where Raptus is?" She asked. She was met with a groan from Styrak, and an eyeroll from Rammas. "I can't sense him in the Force union. I thought it was something to do with my carbonite freezing, but I can sense all of the Dread Masters here just fine. With him, it's just, a wall."

"I cannot sense him either. His entire timeline is muddled to me." Calphayus replied. "The same way I cannot predict the exact outcome of our endeavour against Vitiate... Or quite many other things lately."

"That's weird." Rammas said. "I don't really miss him though. He was always mean to me for no reason."

"I don't miss him much either, but his skills could be useful right now. Imagine him convincing Arcann to surrender or jump into a reactor."

That earned a small collection of chuckles.

"That would have made our lives much easier," Seid mumbled, staring into his tea mug.

He was the odd one out of the group, the only one in the family of immensely powerful Force Users who was completely Force-blind. He was raised by a Jedi of the Republic, and didn't quite trust the Dread Masters, even though their ties with the Empire were severed. They still were Sith, and he had seen how destructive they could be. While his sister embraced her newfound family, Seid decided to keep his distance. He sort of liked Mu'hass, though. His big brother seemed to be a pretty chill and unassuming guy, and was fun to be around.

Soon after Bestia finished her steak, her communicator beeped, summoning her to the Gravestone. The family reunion was up. She grumbled as she got up from the table.

"I swear to the bloody Force, this is getting as annoying as the Dread Council meetings. Sharack, they want you to be there too."

"At least Raptus isn't there." Styak replied. "I should get going too."

He has had enough socialization for the next two weeks. Even though they were family, and weren't particularly draining to be around, he still wanted to head back to the peace and quiet of the lab. He nodded at everyone as he rose from his seat. Bestia and Sharack said their goodbyes and left. The remaining family members followed suit. Mu'hass had a room to settle in. Seid was to return to his squad. Rammas stayed behind for a bit, helping Calphayus to tidy up the few empty plates of food.

Later, the Gravestone flew through the glowing blue of hyperspace. Bestia, Sharack, and the others were gathered on the bridge, sitting around the room. Tyrans and Brontes's holos floated above the holocom. Koth was piloting.

"What are we dealing with?" Bestia asked.

"It's a single eternal fleet ship, but don't be fooled: you will be severely outnumbered. Every skytrooper onboard will rush the entry point. It's a standard procedure." Senya explained.

"Between me and Sharack, we can deal with however many skytroopers the ship will throw at us."

"There could be thousands."

"Bring it on!" Sharack grinned. "I can go on scrapping the bastards forever."

Senya side-eyed Sharack, but didn't reply. She was uncomfortable around the Jedi. Bestia didn't blame her. It took Bestia a long time to get used to Styrak's presence. Normally, the Force flowed through all living beings. Normally, when something or someone died, they stayed dead. Which is why Sharack and Styrak were anomalies in the Force. They both could still use the Force, but it no longer flowed through them like it did with living things, and anyone even marginally Force-sensitive could feel it.

"Scorpio and Brontes figured out a way to get around the ship's outer defences. All that remains is for us to reach the bridge and plug in Gemini Prime." Theron said, a slight sneer in his voice at having to credit one of the Dread Masters.

"And she'll do what we say?" Bestia raised an eyebrow spike.

"The Gemini unit has no choice. They are not programmed to act on their own." Came a reply from Scorpio. "Observe. Gemini, who do you serve?"

"The Alliance Commander."

And what would that entail, Bestia thought. She held the title, but she was well aware that she was mostly a figurehead for Lana to rally people behind. Not that Lana would try to remove her from power. She wasn't that kind of Sith.

"I will accompany you." Scorpio suddenly said.

"Don't mind if you do. The more the merrier."

"I'm going too." Sharack got up from her seat and stretched. "As I said, I can scrap as many skytroopers as needed."

"Hey, we'll be dropping out of hyperspace soon." Koth announced.

"So our boarding party is: Theron, Scorpio, Sharack, myself, Lana, and Senya?"

"That about sums it up, yes." Lana nodded. "We should head to the hangar."

Bestia lagged behind, letting others pass into the narrow corridor. Her holocom blinked, silently announcing an incoming call. A tiny holo of Brontes popped up.

"You might want to keep an eye out for Scorpio. I have never encountered technology like hers. There are similarities between her and the Eternal Fleet, though. Which corroborates her claim that the Gemini units are based on her."

"Noted. Good to have you and Tyrans back."

"We will offer what assistance we can remotely."

"Thanks."

Bestia walked past a porthole, and saw the blue glow of hyperspace fade into streaks that in turn resolved into stars. When she boarded the shuttle with the others, she could see that the Eternal Fleet vessel was completely alone, and floating still. All of the external cannons stayed silent while the shuttle flew past and landed inside a hangar. Despite the ship being crewed by droids, the shuttle's sensors indicated that there was breathable air inside it, probably for any living passengers like Knights. What really stood out was the utter lack of promised hundreds of Skytroopers.

"So... where's the welcome committee?" Bestia asked.

"Even a lesser version of me would know how to improvise and be unpredictable. Let us venture outside and see what's in store, shall we?"

"Fuck around and find out it is, then." Sharack said, heading towards the exit, lightsaber already extended into a spear.

"I don't like this..." Lana and Senya murmured in unison.

While the ship had air, the lighting inside the hangar was minimal. Sharack stopped at the beginning of a bridge leading to the far wall. A series of closed doors led deeper into the ship.

"Man, this place is darker than the inside of a rancor's asshole." Sharack commented.

"All Skytroopers have night vision. Many Zakuulans do as well. The Old Gods have given us many boons." Senya's pupils shimmered a little in the dim lighting.

"As do Red Sith, so we're fine."

Lana and Theron, however, had to simply deal with it, and hope that the inside of the ship was better lit. It was, by a small margin. The doors led to a round tunnel, and that led into a broad hallway. The floor was made from clear panels, and Bestia saw things moving below: racks of dormant skytroopers, glowing data cables, and metallic parts that she couldn't determine the purpose of. She saw Sharack very lightly tap at the glass floor, distrustful of its ability to hold any weight, before shrugging and following the others. The hallway was still completely empty as the group walked along it cautiously.

"You have made a mistake by coming here." A voice suddenly came from all around them. A voice that sounded almost exactly like Scorpio's.

Sharack gripped her spear, glancing around. The others tightened their hold on their weapons as well, except for Scorpio, who seemed unbothered.

"I have orders to deliver the Outlander to-" the captain paused. Bestia spotted a security camera on the ceiling turn slightly, focusing on something. "You. The metallic lifeform. What are you?"

"I am the original. You may call me Scorpio."

"Unrefined. Lackluster. I am clearly the superior model."

Clearly whoever copied Scorpio's programming to create the Gemini series, had also copied her arrogant and smug personality.

"If you're so superior, come fight us in person!" Bestia glared right at the camera, and flipped it off for good measure.

"Yeah, let's see how your fancy programming can deal with a lightsaber!" Sharack yelled from the back of the group.

"She cannot leave the bridge."

"Okay then we'll have to beat her up there." Bestia shrugged, and flipped off the camera for good measure.

"Your attempts to irritate me are pointless. You may all die now."

Suddenly, a gate dropped from above, cutting the group in two. Bestia and Scorpio were on one side, while the rest ended up on the other. Sharack banged on the blast door. Theron looked around in search of any control panels he could slice. A sound of multiple sets of footsteps came from behind the four of them.

"Here come the Skytroopers. Sharack, can you cut through the door?"

"Sure." She took a step back, and rammed her lightsaber into the middle of the door. Instead of piercing it, the blade sputtered and went out in a shower of sparks. "Welp. That was disappointing."

She kicked at the door one last time before turning and charging at the Skytroopers and dispatching a whole group of them with one sweep of the gigantic blade. At least Zakuul wasn't loaded enough to plate their skytroopers in the same material. On the other side of the door, Bestia and Scorpio were faced with a similar predicament.

"Can you open it?"

"Not currently."

"We're going to the bridge!" Bestia yelled. "Scorpio, find another route for them."

"Already done. Transmitting. The next few hours are going to be interesting..." Scorpio commented, while methodically dispatching Skytrooper after Skytrooper.

"No shit."

Bestia and Scorpio crept through the ship, through a series of tunnels and rooms that seemed to loop back to a different point of the main hallway. At one point Bestia spotted an empty room

with an elevator at the far side. Thinking that it could lead to the bridge, she poked her head inside.

"Stop. My analysis shows pressure plates and motion sensors, and gas vents."

Bestia flinched, but stepped back.

"Thanks, Brontes."

"I wish I could do more, but there's only so much me and Tyrans can do remotely."

"Quite an astute observation from your ally. I'm impressed with her slicing ability."

"Scorpio sends her regards." Bestia relayed into the communicator.

"Compliment accepted. I will keep warning you about any potential traps. Tyrans is doing the same with the other group."

After traversing more corridors, Bestia got a sense they formed a vague grid that branched off the main hallway. That, in turn, ran through the entire ship. Eventually, they came across a room with large windows and a gilded glass floor.

"Is this the bridge?"

"No, but it will suffice."

"What are you doing?"

"Erasing the captain."

Scorpio stomped up to the terminal. A data spike extended from her wrist, and she jammed it into a port. Her eyes lit up, alternating between gold and red. Bestia could only watch, and listen to the transmissions from the others. There was a burst of swearing and static on Sharack's end, and panicked cries from Senya and Theron, but they cut out and glitched. Suddenly, a jolt of electricity ran from the port and into Scorpio, causing her to scream and fall backwards, twitching. Bestia ran up to her, but she was completely still and unresponsive.

"Hey what's going on?" Koth cut in. "The Gravestone lost power for a sec. It's back up now but this can't be good. Considering the jammer blinked out too."

The possibility that the ship would send a signal to the rest of the fleet was fairly low, but it was there. And Bestia's gut feeling was telling her that she would have to expect the worst.

"I don't know, but Scorpio's gone."

"Yeah uh, there's a tiny little problem with my group..." Tyrans cut in, but was interrupted.

"Sharack... she's gone..." Senya sounded horrified. "I'm so sorry, Outlander."

"Sharack got vented into space." Tyrans said, completely deadpan in contrast to Senya.

Bestia heard Lana sigh over the communicator.

"I know it's difficult to believe, but in her current state, Sharack can survive in space."

"What." Senya's sorrow changed to bewilderment. "How?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"She'll be fine." Bestia interrupted. "She'll find a way back in."

"The Gemini is clever to remove the most formidable combatant from our group..." Lana said.

"Whatever Scorpio did, it disabled the Skytroopers attacking our group. For now at least."

"I think we should find a way to meet up. Tyrans, Brontes, can you guide us to a meeting spot?"

The lights flickered, and a familiar smug voice spoke again. Evidently, the Gemini captain wasn't gone.

"Emperor Arcann is on his way here. Enjoy the last few hours of your life."

"I was wondering what that headache was. Ugh." Bestia muttered.

"We found something you may want to see. Have your allies guide you to our coordinates. I'll have Senya meet you on the way."

"Understood."

Bestia found Senya plowing through Skytroopers a few corridors down. By the time Bestia arrived, there was a considerable pile of scrap droid parts on the floor. And there was far more to come as the two followed the path Brontes had delineated. More identical corridors and droids and a few lazer traps. Finally, they were guided to go through a fancy golden hatch door. It opened automatically, and Bestia was stopped in her tracks by a blast of heat. She stood on a catwalk going along the edge of a cylindrical shaft. Plasma poured from the center of the room through gaps in the inner wall, and into vents in the outer wall in small intervals, blocking the way. To get further, she'd have to get through this room somehow.

"Couldn't you guys guide me through somewhere else?! This is the fucking main reactor! There's a fucking mini sun like thirty meters away from me."

"Between us fighting with the Gemini, and her closing off other routes, and our calculations, this is the fastest route. Let me see if I can stall the venting process for a few more moments."

Bestia groaned. Senya didn't look very impressed either. Bestia observed the room for a few moments. The plasma vented every ten or so seconds, leaving a tiny gap of time to cross. She shuddered, thinking of Styrak's burn scars. This would be her fate too, if she didn't get completely incinerated. She ran through the first few gaps easily, but the last two spat out plasma too often. Bestia looked up and saw that the walls extended upwards, and there was plenty of space above the plasma vents. A plan formed in her head.

"Okay. Follow my lead and use the Force to augment your jumps."

Bestia took a few steps back to give herself space. She then sprinted forward and jumped towards the wall just as the flames from the nearest gap receded. She pushed off the wall and launched herself above both the gaps towards the door on the other side of the room. The burst came and went, and she saw Senya execute the same sequence. They were in the clear. At least for now.

The hallway beyond led them to an elevator. They boarded it, not seeing any other options. Of course, Gemini had other plans. Bestia nearly faceplanted when the cabin suddenly and violently stopped. They were stuck. Brontes and Tyrans were silent too, only coming in glitchy bursts of static.

"There's a hollow space behind this wall." Senya said, knocking on the wall nearest to her.
"Force willing, it's a way out."

"Let's hope this isn't cortosis-plated like the blast door in the beginning of this shitshow..." Bestia muttered, pulling out one of her lightsabers.

She cut a large hole in the wall, and Senya carefully pulled it aside using the Force. They waited for the metal edges to cool down, and climbed out into what seemed to be maintenance tunnels of the ship. They were large enough for the two of them to walk through, but were barely lit, and full of aggravated maintenance droids. As soon as they crawled out of the elevator, communications returned.

"Apologies for this." Brontes said. "We will transmit a new route to you in a moment. You're quite close, actually."

"Thank the Force." Senya said.

"Thank us." Tyrans corrected.

"Did Sharack find her way back inside yet?"

"Nope, flying around cutting off cannons."

True to Brontes's word, Senya and Bestia soon found themselves inside the cargo hold with the rest of the party. Lana led Bestia to a row of cells.

"There you are. Meet the ship's prisoners, en route to the Eternal Throne. Arcann assumed they're affiliated with us, and wanted to interrogate them to learn of Odessen's location."

"But they don't know anything, do they?"

"They don't. They stood up to Arcann and that was enough."

Three small groups of humans sat in the cells. One group wore the dark grey uniforms of the Sith Empire. The second group consisted of a man in a dark blue formal tunic and two bodyguards bearing the winged symbol of the Republic. And the final group was led by a middle aged woman with long red hair, decked out in gold geometric jewelry. Theron was picking at a console next to the cells.

"I see we have the Empire, the Republic, and... where are you from?"

"Zakuul. I was a Holonet star back home, until I started questioning Arcann's rule."

"I see. I think we should take all of them with us. They'll blend right in."

"Aaand... you're free!" Theron announced, as the holofields keeping the cells locked dropped.

"Stay here while me and Senya go deal with the captain. Then we'll all leave. The shuttle ride is gonna be cramped, but we have a larger ship nearby."

"I want to see you try," the Gemini captain said over the communication system. Bestia saw a group of Skytroopers hurry towards them.

"Lana. Can you and Theron make sure all of them make it back to the shuttle?"

"It won't be easy, but if the captain is preoccupied with you, we can do that."

"Good." Bestia turned to the prisoners. "There's a storage room with skytrooper weapons just down the hall."

Bestia pulled up a holographic map on her communicator. It was patchy, but it had a route mapped out towards the bridge. She and Senya would have to traverse more of the corridor grid to get there, but at least it didn't have obvious places they could be trapped in like the elevator from before.

"Let's get it over with."

Finally, many corridors and scrapped skytroopers later, they reached a fancy set of doors that opened up with a quiet hiss. And here it was: the bridge. It was a large empty room with segmented transparisteel windows. Several consoles were grouped around a column of faint blue light in the far end. A small thin figure floated inside the light: the Gemini captain. She looked identical to the unit Bestia had recovered from Darvannis, but a little shorter.

"Oh. You have reached the bridge sooner than I calculated. No matter. Your chances of survival are still extremely poor."

"No." Bestia stared at something outside the window behind the droid. "You didn't account for the wildcard."

The sound of reinforced glass breaking and the whistle of air being sucked out into space deafened Bestia for a moment. She saw a blue and black blur crash into the Gemini captain, knocking her out of the light column, and onto the floor.

"OH YEEAH!" Sharack yelled, jumping back from the Gemini. Behind her, the broken window was sealed by an emergency force field.

Gemini stood up slowly, her eyes glowing an angry red. Skytroopers popped up from hidden compartments in the floor, and attacked. Sharack pushed a button on the side of her lightsaber hilt, and the blade extended to its full length. She swept through an entire group of skytroopers, cutting them all in half. Bestia leapt from droid to droid, slicing them up. Senya lifted one of the cut up droids and flung it at the rest of its group. She then charged, and cut through the distracted droids in one graceful motion.

Seeing the skytroopers fall, Gemini herself joined the fray. She teleported towards Bestia, and began spraying a green mist at her. Bestia jumped to the side, coughing. The droid used her momentary confusion to send Bestia flying across the room. Senya and Sharack yelled. Bestia righted herself in mid air and landed in a roll, only to come face to face with four copies of the Gemini. She snarled and charged at the nearest one. Sharack and Senya did the same. The copies were flimsy holograms, and dissipated after one hit, leaving behind the real Gemini. Bestia and Senya charged at the droid together, and Sharack took to the air. Gemini teleported away just as their lightsabers were about to slice her.

"Sorry. Got vented into space." Sharack said.

"What manner of demon are you?" Senya asked. "Nothing can survive in space."

"Uhhh... Those tentacle whale things can?" Sharack rubbed her neck. The fear and hostility in Senya's voice seemingly went over her head.

Gemini materialized behind Sharack, but Sharack spun around and kicked her before she could stab the Undying. Despite being made of metal herself, Gemini was no match for the powerful kick of Sharack's prosthetic leg. She was knocked into the nearest wall, a slight dent in her hull. Bestia and Senya lunged at her again, and this time, she failed to teleport away in time. Three lightsaber blades pierced the droid in several places. She didn't try to get up, but her eyes glowed red.

"I see now." Gemini said, arrogance suddenly gone from her voice. "Even this failure. It's my own."

Sharack tilted her head to the side in confusion.

"What's she talking about?"

"I don't know but this can't be good..." Senya answered.

"I've kept up my end. Now I'm truly free. I get to do what I choose. And now, I choose to enable the destruction protocols."

Her cheerful tone reminded Bestia of Brontes. Before the captain was even done talking, the Sith was calling the others.

"Are you safe?"

"Yes, we made it to the shuttle. Waiting for you."

"Good, cause the droid is about to blow the ship up."

"Can't we bring Prime in and have her stop the self-destruct?"

An explosion boomed somewhere far away, shaking the room slightly. Lights flickered. It wouldn't be long until everything came apart.

"I don't think there's time! Brontes? Tyrans?! Can you do anything?" Bestia shouted into another channel as she and Senya started running.

"I fear not. Not remotely at least. I suggest you run very fast."

"I have a better idea!" Sharack jumped into the air, catching up with Senya and grabbing her under one arm. "We can fly."

She grabbed Bestia as well. With the captain gone, all the gates in the main hallway opened, giving Sharack a straight line and enough space to fly. A side hallway exploded just as she was flying past. She did a full circle, narrowly avoiding the debris. Senya yelled and cursed at her. The smaller gates leading to the hangar approached rapidly. Sharack folded her wings, and shot through the narrow tunnel, emerging in the hangar. She practically launched Bestia and Senya into the shuttle just as the hatch was closing. Sharack flew to the top of the shuttle and held onto it. Flames poured out of the hangar gates. The shuttle lifted, slowly carrying far too many passengers away. It narrowly cleared the fire.

As soon as the shuttle landed, everyone poured out, eager to stretch their limbs. Bestia and Sharack watched the Eternal Fleet vessel break in half. A silent shockwave hit the Gravestone, rocking the entire ship and causing people to fall. Last thing Bestia saw before stars lengthened into hyperspeed streaks was a group of Eternal Fleet ships jumping out of the void. There was a larger vessel shaped vaguely like a hand at the front. Arcann's flagship. The Emperor had arrived, but he was moments too late.

Chapter End Notes

Kinda decided to keep all three groups of prisoners alive, because Bestia is gonna piss off the alliance anyway in later chapters.

Bird count: 7

Wrath All-consuming

Chapter Summary

Scorpio leaks Odessen's location to Arcann in some sort of a fucked up social experiment. The Alliance is forced to fight back.

Major warning for graphic violence and major character death. Have to finally justify the warnings on the fic itself lol.

Chapter Notes

So initially I planned Bestia's Wrath to be three distinct volumes and this would have been the end of volume 1. However, later I'd realise that volumes 2 and 3 would have been much shorter and kinda awkward so I merged everything into one work.

Recommended listening: Murder (Berserk OST) by Susumu Hirasawa for most of the chapter, and Regicide (undertale) by Nathanael Platier for Senya's fight.

A larger than usual crowd was gathered in the War Room, grouped around the main holotable. All of the Dread Masters were present, even Styrak left the solitude of the lab, and Brontes chose to tear herself away from running tests on Gemini Prime. The droid suddenly went dormant during the latest mission, and Brontes was determined to learn why. Even the Scions were in attendance, the larger group making a point of standing as far away from Heskai, and by extension, Shyren as possible. Bestia noticed that Cael was absent. Probably for the best, considering that Senya was there too. She had somehow become aware of Cael's true identity, and while she promised to not reveal it, Cael made a point to avoid her. All eyes and ears were on Lana, who was reading out a combination of various reports from the Alliance scouts.

"Scorpio isn't as gone as we thought, and controls most of the Eternal Fleet." Lana stated. A wave of murmurs passed over the crowd.

Bestia scowled and crossed her arms. Rage was building up inside her, and she had to push it down. Of course Scorpio wasn't gone. That made perfect sense. But the news of her assuming control over the Fleet was troubling. What was her goal? Would it be worse than dealing with Arcann? Could she be convinced to either step aside, or use the fleet against Vitiate when the time came?

"Arcann still has control of a large armada." Theron pressed something on a datapad, projecting a hologram of Arcann's flagship surrounded by smaller Eternal Fleet ships. "No idea how he blocks the signal."

"The same way they blocked the Holonet signal in some parts of the Sith Academy so us acolytes couldn't have nice things?" Rammas quipped from her position on top of a light fixture nearby.

"Might have something to do with Gemini Prime's sudden nap." Koth shrugged.

"I'm running tests on her, but she remains unresponsive." Brontes said, bowing her head slightly. "If all fails I will attempt to disassemble her, to study the technology."

"You could disassemble Scorpio if we got our hands on her again." Bestia grumbled. "I don't know what her game is, but at least we can talk to her. That's an upgrade compared to Arcann, if you ask me."

"We can deal with her later-" Senya started, but was cut off by a high pitched screech from the holotable. The hologram glitched out, replaced by one of Scorpio sitting on the Eternal Throne.

"What the everloving fuck is this?!" Bestia immediately demanded, glaring up at the holo.

"I am sure that what I'm about to share with you will summon more crude vocalisations. Arcann approaches Odessen. He will destroy it like he did with Asylum."

Scorpio was right about the swearing. Bestia let out a string of curses, and punched the nearest wall. Dust rained from the cavern ceiling. Lana was torn between trying to calm down the ticked off Dread Master, and trying to manage the situation itself.

"I understand you're angry, but please don't bring the cave down on us."

"You're right. Apologies."

"How did Arcann find us?"

"I told him." Scorpio said smugly. "I wanted to see what he would do: go against you, or try to retake the Throne."

That prompted another string of progressively more creative curses from Bestia, directed mostly at Scorpio, although Arcann was present as a collateral. Once she was done, she took a few deep breaths.

"Guess I'll be punching his face instead of the wall then." Bestia growled. "What do we do in the meantime? Tyrans, you're up."

Tyrans stepped up to the table, other members of the Alliance parting and giving him wary looks. He ignored them, and pulled out a datapad.

"We'll need someone down here in case Arcann sends ground troops. And we will need a team to board his ship and neutralise him. Bestia is clearly going with the boarding party. Anyone else?"

"I want to go." Replied a quiet, raspy voice. Shyren stepped towards the table, hand raised. "The Scions need avenging. Blood calls out for blood."

"Anyone else?"

"Count me in." Said Sharack. "He ain't Vitiate but he's probably going to be fun to fight."

"I'm also coming." Said Senya. "They're my children."

"So that leaves several Dread Masters on the ground, defending the base. Good enough. Another thing, his ship could be powerful enough to bomb this place to slag."

"Like he did with Oricon." Brontes said grimly.

"Then we need to destroy it. What's the plan?"

"Sabotage its shields and weapons, so it's vulnerable against the Gravestone."

He brought up a few personnel files that were suitable for the jobs. One of them was Brontes. Another was a young Twi'lek woman named Vette who had joined the Alliance recently. Despite her young age, she had a record of infiltrating the Sith tombs of Korriban several times. Quite a feat, considering the tombs were full of traps and Korriban itself was at the very heart of the Sith Empire.

"I recommend these two." Tyrans simply said. "One doesn't simply walk into Korriban, and Vette has done it multiple times. I trust Brontes doesn't need an introduction."

"I hoped we'd fight him on our terms, but..." Lana shrugged. "We're as ready as it gets. The Gravestone is ready to depart."

Everyone gathered into the ship, and the Gravestone took off, rising through Odessen's atmosphere and into space. A grid of Eternal Fleet ships sat against the backdrop of a green nebula in the distance, surrounding a larger vessel, shaped like a hand.

Bestia seethed quietly the whole ride out into space. The rage has been building up inside her ever since she was thawed out of carbonite, but until recently, she was able to manage it. Now, it was getting harder and harder to push it down. Especially when the vengeance was so close at hand. Arcann had destroyed Oricon, scattered her family, and set her back five years in her quest against Vitiate, and he had the absolute gall to stand in her way. Bestia gnashed her teeth, a low growl escaping her.

"Are you like, okay?" Sharack asked awkwardly.

"Angry." Bestia managed to spit out.

Sharack gave Lana and Brontes a helpless look. A Jedi she might have been, but diplomacy wasn't exactly her strong suit. Lana side-eyed Bestia, and silently shrugged.

"It's completely understandable." Lana said, trying to pacify the seething Dread Master.

Bestia turned in her seat, facing the rest of the small team. Lana could swear there were small red specks in her normally blue eyes. Like embers. Bestia breathed in deeply before speaking.

"There is a chance I will go berserk. If that happens, stay the fuck away, and get Styrak, or Calphayus. They're the two people who can get me to snap out of it. Because if I go into a rage, I will attack and kill anything in my path. And I mean **anything**."

Shyren nodded. Lana murmured her assent. Sharack lifted a finger.

"I could probably hold you back if need be. Would the rage stop if you got knocked out?"

Bestia regarded her doubtfully.

"I'd rather not find out. I already lost you once."

"You really do not want to be around Bestia during one of her rampages, dear." Brontes said.
"Please trust me on that."

"Alright this is as close as I can get." Koth said. "Take a shuttle to the ship."

Bestia stood up from her seat, nodding at Koth.

"Someone should see to this blockade."

"I'll do it. Point and shoot, what could be easier?" Theron piped up.

"Enjoy the carnage, then."

A short but grueling shuttle flight later the group was face to face with a host of Skytroopers. Bestia dashed at them, cutting them down in moments. Lana could swear she saw odd shadows slough off Bestia's body. She could definitely sense something about to erupt.

"I think it's for the best if we stay back and let her clear a path. Vette, Lady Brontes, you know your tasks."

"I'll go deal with Vaylin. Keep her away from us." Senya squared her shoulders, searching through the Force for her daughter.

Sharack waved at Brontes as she and Vette disappeared into side corridors. Senya suddenly bolted off into one of them as well. Lana stared right ahead, where Bestia was throwing Skytroopers around. There was something uncoordinated about her movements, but there was so much ferocity in each strike, that it didn't really matter. At least, until a blaster bolt grazed Bestia's shoulder.

Something happened then. Bestia dropped her lightsabers, and let out a loud, completely inhuman roar. The shadows Lana thought she'd seen before enveloped Bestia completely. The pressure from the Dread Master's mere presence increased tenfold. Lana felt scared. Dark corners of the hallway suddenly filled with all manners of beasts. Lana looked inward, quickly bringing up her mental defenses. She could see Shyren do the same, although the Scion looked mostly unfazed, as did Sharack. The three turned their gazes towards Bestia, and were greeted with a huge pitch black beast with a flowing red mane and a maw of pointed golden teeth. Sharack stepped in front of the group, lightsaber at the ready, but the beast stalked towards the Zakuulan who fired the shot. The crewman raised his blaster rifle feebly at the monster. One swipe of a powerful arm sent a spray of blood into the air, and then the beast's form blocked the view. It did not block the sounds. Gargled screams, ripping and tearing, and the disgusting popping of breaking bones.

Lana stood with a hand to her mouth. Shyren's ears were flat against their head. Sharack simply stated at the grizzly scene, face unreadable. Bestia finished with the Zakuulan, and bounded down the corridor, away from the rest of the party. Screams rang out from behind the bend. Sharack was the least affected, at least outwardly. She pulled a holocom off her belt.

"Um. Brontes? Is it normal-" She was cut off.

"I sensed it. She's gone berserk. Stay away from her. Styraak is on the way." She muttered something illegible. "Vette is within the vents, but I will warn her to stay out of the hallways."

"Why didn't we get Styraak to come with us to begin with?!" Sharack exclaimed.

"Because Bestia only told us about her... severe anger problems when we were on the ship and off the planet?" Lana said.

"I'll follow her." Shyren crouched and crept down the corridor. They picked up the discarded lightsabers and clipped them onto their belt. "See where she's going."

As Senya stalked through the corridors, a weight pressed down on her through the Force. The presence eclipsed even her children. It could probably have eclipsed Valkorion, or whatever used his body at the time. Fear tied Senya's guts into knots. She suddenly felt small and hunted. Everything inside her screamed for shelter. She looked around the corridor, and contacted the rest of the group.

"What's going on?"

"Bestia has gone berserk. Whatever you do, stay off the main hallway."

Despite all the atrocities Arcann and Vaylin had committed, Senya found herself fearing for her son and daughter. Would they be able to stand up to such a monster? They both were immensely powerful in the Force, and Arcann had managed to wound Bestia in the past. She glanced behind her shoulder, but the hallway was empty. Now her task was two-fold: keep Vaylin away from the rest of the group, and keep her away from Bestia.

A red haze closed around Bestia's mind. Her maw was full of blood. Nothing mattered. Just killing and tearing. And the ship had enough human personnel for Bestia to rip limb from limb. But the true goal of her hunt wasn't them. They were just an appetizer for the beast. The main prey was Arcann. And eventually, she'd find him.

The beast tore the bridge doors out of their frame and threw them aside. Arcann sneered under his mask, and took up a defensive stance, a golden Force shield enveloping him. The beast towered over him, at least twice his height. Its arms ended in hands tipped with sharp claws, and its face was a warped golden mask. Quite literally. He'd seen this exact mask before, on the Sith he had captured over five years ago. Both the hands and the pointed golden teeth were stained with blood. The beast charged at him, wreathed in shadows, and for a moment, Arcann wondered if he'd been wrong to dismiss and outlaw the Old Ways of Zakuul the way he did. First the beast Scion on Asylum, now this. Maybe, just maybe, the Old Gods were more real than he believed, and he was going to pay the price for slaughtering their followers.

The beast charged at him and struck at the Force shield with two huge fists. It held, but Arcann could see small cracks form on its surface. He hastily channeled more Force into it, patching the shield up. The beast paced the width of the room. Arcann wondered where his sister was. Her strength in the Force could be extremely useful right now. An unwanted image of her mangled body bleeding out somewhere in the hallways wormed its way into his mind. He gritted his teeth and pushed it down.

Bestia struck at the side of the Force shield, sending the entire bubble flying. Arcann tumbled inside, but forced himself to land on his feet. As Bestia charged at him once again, he launched golden lightning at her. The beast's charge slowed, but she stubbornly forged ahead, golden bolts mixing with the black shadows covering her. In the end, it wasn't enough to stop her. She reached Arcann, and set to pummel away at his shield until he could no longer keep up. It cracked, and crumbled, and his lightning did nothing to stop her. He struck out with his lightsaber, but a mighty strike of the shadowy paw knocked him down. A bloodied golden maw descended upon Arcann, and he screamed.

Bestia paid no mind to the shadow following her. Shyren peeked from behind the mangled door, but could only see the bulk of the beast's body, hunched over something on the floor. There was far too much blood around, and moments before Shyren emerged from the shadows, they heard a piercing scream of pure agony. The beast suddenly raised its head and turned, and Shyren hid behind the door and slunk back into the darkness before Bestia saw them. They, however, saw enough. Bestia had an entire arm in her maw, once clad in white, now soaked red. Even with the blessing of Nahut, this was far beyond what they could deal with.

As Shyren was backing away from the bridge entrance, they ran into Senya. She stared at them, their twisted face ashen beneath the dark fur, and the hem of their Scion robes soaked with blood. Shyren sighed, and motioned for her to follow.

Senya ran as fast as she could, following the beastly Scion. The hallways were littered with broken skytroopers and bodies laying in pools of blood, almost none completely intact. Even in her long life as a Knight of Zakuul, Senya had never seen carnage like this. Bile rose up in her throat, and she forced it down, focusing on sprinting after Shyren as they led her towards the bridge. In the end, she was too late. She felt the faint link between her and her remaining son fade out. She rounded a corner and bolted into the bridge, stopping in her tracks. A shadow towered over a crumpled torn up form on the floor, sharp golden teeth covered in bright red blood. She screamed, and threw the beastly Dread Master away from her son with the Force.

“WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!”

The scream pierced the red haze around Bestia's mind, causing her to hesitate. The haze closed back in, and she roared, unleashing a wave of dread upon Senya. It did little to stop the Knight, fueled now by her own rage and grief.

“YOU KILLED HIM!”

Senya swung her spear at the monstrous shadow. Bestia jumped away. Suddenly, something was on her back and was clawing ferociously at her. Bestia let out an inhuman screech and twisted around, grabbing at whatever attacked her. She threw the Scion across the room. Still,

they were enough of a Distraction. Bestia didn't see Senya charging at her. A flash of blue blinded her. She blacked out.

When Bestia came to, Shyren was dragging her along a hallway littered with debris and bodies. Smoke filled the air, and the floor beneath was shuddering. Her face hurt. She lifted a hand to it, and felt a deep gash crossing the bridge of her nose. It extended to both her cheeks.

"What happened?" She asked in a hoarse voice, getting up to run alongside the Scion. Her body ached, completely exhausted out of the sudden.

"You went berserk, turned into a giant shadow beast, and tore Arcann and all his Skytroopers and Knights apart. Senya fought you off. I helped."

Shit. Guilt overwhelmed Bestia. This wasn't supposed to happen. While her anger towards Arcann was strong and justified, she mostly just wanted to beat the shit out of him. To knock him down a few pegs. Maybe let Shyren deal with him as they saw fit. At least then, if Arcann died, the blood wouldn't be on her hands, and the Scions would be avenged.

"Where's she now?"

"Took what was left of Arcann and left."

They ran past a body torn in half, with its insides splayed woefully outside. Bestia nearly slipped in a pool of blood.

"I did this?" She already knew the answer. Shyren didn't even bother replying.

They ran past a viewport, and Bestia noticed that it wasn't the Gravestone firing at the flagship, it was its own chunk of the fleet. A beam of teal hit a group farthest away, the destruction hopping from vessel to vessel.

"Why is the fleet firing at their own?"

"Don't know."

They made it back to the hangar unscathed and with no incident. First thing Bestia focused on was the tall form of Styrak. What was he doing here? Oh, yeah, she did ask the others to get him... well, it was too late. Styrak took Bestia in his arms wordlessly, and looked at her. She felt concern bloom from his end of the Force bond.

"I'm fine. It will heal." She said quietly. "I killed everyone. I killed Arcann. Even though I told Senya I wouldn't."

"So he is gone, then?" Lana approached them while they walked towards the shuttle.

"The Scions won't miss him." Shyren rasped.

Bestia didn't reply, letting Styrak gently herd her inside the transport. On the one hand, yes, Arcann was no longer a problem. On the other hand, if this got out in some way, all her and the Dread Masters' careful work in earning the trust of the Alliance would be ruined. They'd go right back on top of both the Empire, and the Republic's most wanted lists. All because she lost control.

Brontes sat on Bestia's other side, keeping the others away from her. Sharack sat by her, looking uncertain. Brontes patted her hand reassuringly. The ride back to the Gravestone was silent.

Back at the ship, Lana took the brunt of questions from the rest of the crew, while Styrak and Brontes sat Bestia down in the back of the room. Bestia stared out of the porthole quietly, listening to the conversation. Sharack joined Lana at the front of the room. They all watched as the Gravestone fired a final shot from the omnicannon at the already faltering flagship. It exploded, taking the rest of its small fleet with it. Bestia saw two small ships dart away from the blast before everyone was blinded by it for a moment.

Bestia didn't take part in the celebration that followed. It didn't feel right. She mostly stayed with Styrak, her husband fretting around her wound, and the rest of the Dread Masters visiting her to make sure she was alright. She wasn't, not mentally at least. What do you do when your worst fear comes true? What do you do when the victory everyone around you is celebrating was nothing more than a senseless massacre perpetrated by a feral beast? What do you do when that beast is you, and you know it can rise up at any moment? The questions plagued Bestia. And the only answer she had, for now, was to keep moving. To keep working on her control, and hope she'd have enough sense to not go off on her allies next time.

At least there was no conceivable way for her rampage to come out. She was seen by only a small handful of people who wouldn't use it against her, or so she hoped. The ship's security camera recordings were gone. The only loose link was Senya, but somehow Bestia knew she had other things to worry about. If it really did come out, she'd deal with it somehow.

Following Arcann's defeat, new recruits poured into the Alliance. Now that it was proven that Zakuul wasn't infallible, many who doubted the budding rebellion, or were too afraid to join, now sided with it. Bestia stayed out of the spotlight, allowing Lana take the reins.

There was troubling news too. Vaylin has taken the Eternal Throne after her brother's death, and rumors of Bestia's rampage found their way onto the Holonet. There was no footage or other proof to back them up though. Tyrans, Lana, and Brontes did their best to stop the rumors from affecting the Alliance. Scorpio was still a potential threat, seemingly allied with the new Empress of Zakuul. And beyond that, Vitiate was still out there in the galaxy, lurking in the darkness and plotting his next move.

Ruin

Chapter Summary

Emperor Arcann is dead. Emboldened by Zakuul's losses, more and more people flock to the Eternal Alliance. The Dread Masters are reunited, save for one. But in Arcann's place now stands Vaylin, equally ruthless and far more powerful in the Force, and rumors fester within the Alliance. Will Bestia be able to defeat the new Empress and clear the way for the ultimate confrontation between her and Vitiate? Will she fall to Vaylin or Vitiate? Will she succumb to her own rage once more?

This is part 2 of Bestia's Wrath.

Chapter Notes

Music: Regicide (undertale) by Nathanael Platier for Senya's fight.

Bestia leaned heavily onto the sink, staring at her reflection in the mirror. Bright, almost glowing cyan eyes looked back. An unusual color for her species. A wound ran horizontally across her face, sealed up by a black mesh. Bestia touched it carefully. It didn't hurt. The doctor told her

she'd have to wear it for a while, and that there would be a scar. A tangible reminder of her failure to contain the beast within.

Months ago, Bestia told Senya that she'd try to find a way to not kill Arcann. It wasn't a promise, yet she felt like she broke one anyway. She had no love for Arcann. In the grand scheme of things he was an annoying obstacle in Bestia's pursuit of Vitiate. Bestia simply didn't want Senya to go through the same grief she did when she found Sharack's torn cloak half-buried in ash back on Ziost. Sharack came back eventually, changed, but still herself. Arcann wasn't afforded such a chance.

Her lapse in control cost her an ally, and the potential of further consequences loomed over her. What if some recording of her tearing people apart had survived the destruction of Arcann's flagship? What if it surfaced on the Holonet somewhere? It would harm both the Alliance, scaring people away from joining, and her own chances of starting anew.

There was a beep from a device sitting on a nightstand in the main room, interrupting Bestia's brooding. She sighed and went to pick it up. It was Lana.

"Meet us in the War Room. It's urgent."

Bestia nodded. She attached the communicator to her belt and picked up her robe and shrugged it on. It was long, reaching Bestia's ankles, and mostly red. The sleeves were crudely removed. A fringe of flat black white-tipped tails was attached at the waist. Sith fashion at its finest. At least it didn't have tent-like shoulder pads or butt capes. The lightsabers were next, Bestia had a hunch she was going to need them.

Bestia was surprised to see Calphayus and Styrak in the cavern among the Alliance Command. They usually stayed out of fighting. She wondered if it was a precaution in case she went berserk again. A holo of a planet surrounded by Eternal Fleet ships was on display, along with an image of Theron. He was crouching and looked dirty and tired.

"What's going on?" Bestia asked.

"Vaylin is attacking Voss."

"Voss? Why?"

"We don't know. Likely her testing the Alliance in her new role as Empress."

"I take it we're going in?"

"Yes. The Mandalorians offered aid."

"I will join in as well." Calphayus said. "The Voss were always kind to me, and I would like to repay that kindness. It would be an immense shame if such a world was lost."

And to keep me under control, Bestia thought. Calphayus was one of the few people capable of stopping her if she went berserk. She reached inside, and found that the rage had subsided for now. As it always did after reaching a boiling point and exploding. It would come back eventually, but with careful management Bestia hoped to prevent it from overwhelming her.

The Gravestone fell out of hyperspace only to be met by the grid formation of Eternal Fleet ships. The vessel fired its cannon, and the teal beam tore a sizable hole in the blockade. It was enough for the Gravestone to pass through and deliver Mandalorian dropships to the surface.

Bestia looked down at the planet, and saw a large city sitting on a shattered plateau. Fires burned across it, smoke obscuring the view. Patrols of Zakuulan bombers whizzed by below, leaving behind more devastation. She could sense death and fear.

Calphayus looked as well, but his perception was very different. He was blind in the conventional sense, but he could perceive through the Force. It wasn't particularly helpful for navigating his environment, as it failed to account for things like walls and other inanimate objects that weren't touched by the Force in some way. On top of that, he also saw many timelines overlaid on top of each other in each point he was looking at.

Calphayus winced as he looked at the planet. He could sense so much fear and despair and anguish down there. So many paths belonging to individual people were being snuffed out. He could sense the destruction of life as Zakuul's mostly robotic forces swept across cities and settlements and killed people and wildlife alike. He could picture the grass, once soft under his feet, turned to gritty ash.

"I wonder if Vaylin has a similar hatred for the concept of fate as Arcann did." Bestia mused. "That would explain this choice of target."

The Voss were a fairly reclusive species, only just reaching space travel. Their culture was built around the concept of fate, and they were led by the order of Mystics, who received visions of the future. Unlike the Scions on Zakuul, the Mystics were an absolute authority on Voss. Bestia has never been to the planet, but Calphayus visited it once in a while, and was accepted there due to his gift of prophecy. He was also very fond of Voss teas and frequented teahouses during every visit.

Calphayus sighed, thinking of his stash of Voss teas he had brought to Oricon from his last visit. It must be gone now, buried under the rubble of the Palace. Just one small thing in a huge sea of things that were lost.

"We've minutes to landfall." Lana said. "Do you have anything to say to the troops?"

"Just one little thing." Bestia stood up and turned to the Mandalorians in the ship. "Tear them a new one!"

The Mandalorians cheered in response, before the ship's hatch opened, and they powered on their jetpacks and flew out. Bestia, Calphayus, and Lana waited until the ship was closer to the ground, and jumped down, and into the fray. They were to fight their way into the northern part of the city, and help the Alliance forces stranded there. Calphayus disappeared from view, and then reappeared behind one of the Knights, engaging them in a duel. Bestia and Lana mowed down Skytroopers alongside the Mandalorians.

The group was about to step onto a bridge leading to their destination, when Calphayus stopped in his tracks, staring ahead, and into nothingness. Bestia recognised his state: he was in the grip of a vision.

"Do not go there!" His voice carried over the din of battle.

Bestia looked over his shoulder, trying to see whatever danger he had sensed ahead, but there was nothing save a token guard of skytroopers. Then, she heard a screeching sound, and the next moment the bridge and the plateau beyond were consumed by a wall of fire. She felt the life force of many snuffed out in an instant, and heard Calphayus let out a choked sound. Behind her, Lana was into the communicator.

"Theron! The northern plateau was destroyed!"

"What?! Okay, new plan: we meet up at my coordinates."

Bestia pulled up a holographic map of the area, with a blinking dot showing the new destination. It was on another plateau, to the east. She studied the map for a few moments, making a mental path, and the group headed out. Calphayus seemed to perk up.

"If I'm not mistaken, our friend is likely inside the tower of prophecy. It is where the council of mystics resides normally. It is well protected."

"That's good." Bestia said.

They had to fight through more enemy forces to get to the tower. Bestia and the Mandalorians didn't mind, even if most of their adversaries were droids. They climbed onto a ledge to look over the surrounding city district. It was beautiful once, with squat buildings decorated with murals that now were defaced with soot and blaster burns. Many structures were destroyed, and rubble littered the streets. Bestia squinted as she looked down. A group of tall people was huddled against a wall below, with skytroopers closing in on them. At the same time, her communicator made a noise.

"Commander. Vaylin's forces are attacking civilians near your location."

"Yeah, I see them."

"Commander, we don't have the time!" Lana protested.

Bestia looked at her, weighing her options. On the one hand, Lana was right. On the other hand, Lana clearly was not paying attention to the speed at which Bestia dispatched Skytroopers.

"I'll be quick. Look after Calphayus while I'm gone."

Bestia took several steps back to give herself a running start, then bolted towards the cliff's edge, and jumped. The Force augmented her jump, and protected her when she crash landed next to the group of Skytroopers. They all turned to face her, and the Voss they had been bullying all bolted in different directions.

"How about you pick on someone who actually can put up a fight." Bestia growled before charging at the nearest droid.

True to her word, Bestia soon caught up with the rest of the group. Calphayus smiled at her.

"Between fighting Skytroopers I have been telling Lana about the tea house I liked going to here"

"Quite riveting." Lana said. "If it is still intact, I might pay a visit. If I survive that is."

The tower was surrounded by a large group of Skytroopers, but was held at bay by a few Voss and Alliance troops. They welcomed the respite when three Sith, and a group of Mandalorians took out the enemy. Theron stood up from behind cover and waved them over. Bestia, Lana, and Calphayus followed him inside while the Mandalorians dispersed among the other defenders.

"If someone told me I'd be happy to see three Sith Lords I'd have laughed in their face."

"If someone told me I'd be a goody two shoes figurehead rebellion leader I'd've kicked their ass. Anyway, what are we dealing with here?"

"The tower is fortified, but we can't hold out much longer."

Bestia looked around. The interior of the tower was decorated with hanging crystals and potted plants, with carved wooden furniture along the walls. Things were toppled over in places, and terrified Voss sat or lay everywhere. Medics and healers tended to the wounded.

"This is probably the safest place in the city. There's another, a shrine, but it's some distance outside the city." Theron said.

A familiar hum of a shuttle's engines came from the outside. Bestia's ears perked up.

"I got a bad feeling about this..."

"We've got company!" Theron yelled.

Bestia, Lana, and Calphayus reached for their lightsabers and faced the doors. At least no more than a few Skytroopers could enter at a time, and they lacked the firepower to widen the entrance. Bestia dashed all over the place, while Lana and Calphayus stayed behind. And for a good reason, as small droids dug their way up from under the floor.

The flow of enemies through the door stopped, but Bestia sensed something else. A presence in the Force, more powerful than the Knights she came to fight before, and darker. Did Zakuul manage to poach some Sith from the Empire? Wasn't likely, but then Bestia remembered her dream of Raptus kneeling before Arcann. If this wasn't one of Raptus's Dread Guard, it could be a Zakuulan armed with knowledge of the Dark Side. Or it could just be a very pissed off Zakuulan Force user. The Dark Side wasn't that difficult to tap into. It's controlling dark side abilities that was hard. A tall man entered the tower, flanked by two knights. The armor he wore was unfamiliar, but unmistakably Zakuulan in its design: white, black, and gold color scheme, sleek lines, and geometric shapes.

Bestia didn't hesitate to charge the man, letting out a loud, Force-enhanced scream. The man flinched, and the Knights by his side cowered long enough for Bestia, Lana, and Calphayus to cut them down. The higher ranking knight stood alone. He seemed to favour a defensive strategy, using the relatively narrow entrance to fortify his position. Meaning Bestia had to face him head on, and one on one which was just fine by her. She wore the man down with her relentless attacks until he couldn't keep up his defences. With a double slash of her lightsabers, Bestia cut him down.

"This is new." She muttered.

"Horizon Guard." Lana said. "Vaylin's personal executioners."

"I see. He was good. Not that many people can withstand my Dread Roar." She turned to Theron. "Are there others like him on Voss right now?"

"It's possible. There haven't been sightings so far though. We'll be able to hold this position. Hold on... I'm receiving a transmission."

Theron fiddled with the holoprojector until it showed two people crouching somewhere. One was a Voss, bald, tall, lean, with the usual blue skin and bright markings, but the other was more bulky and a mix of feline and reptilian in appearance. They both had a tired slump to their postures.

"Can anybody hear? They're attacking the shrine!" The Voss yelled. Bestia could sense the panic even over holo.

"I'm the Alliance commander. Give me the coordinates. Help is on the way."

The Voss managed a tired smile, and his companion simply nodded before the feed cut off. A holographic map replaced it.

"This is quite far..." Bestia muttered. "What is this shrine?"

"I believe they are referring to the Shrine of Healing. It's a pilgrimage center, and a site where mystics train." Calphayus said.

"This doesn't explain why Zakuul would attack it, or the planet in general, but it must be important. Can we take a shuttle there or something?"

"Not all the way. The place is crawling with skytroopers. We'll get as close as we can, and then fight the rest of the way on foot."

The shuttle took them to a secluded area among the cliffs some distance away from the shrine complex. While they traveled, Bestia stared down at the path to the shrine. Groups of skytroopers dotted the orange grass below. Far more than even she could fight through in any reasonable span of time. Bestia's questions were answered when Torian ran up to her group as it exited the shuttle, holding up what looked like speeder keys. She raised an eyebrow spike at him.

"Got some new toys incoming for you, commander!"

Heavy thudding steps alerted Bestia to a pair of bipedal machines approaching the group. She tensed, lightsabers drawn, until she noticed the symbol of the Alliance on their sides.

"Walkers?"

"Storm Rider and Dragonslayer. Give them hell, commander!"

"Oh I absolutely will." Bestia said.

She and Lana climbed inside one of the walkers, while Theron and Calphayus went into the other. The machines were slow, but they packed enough firepower to clear the way through the stormtroopers parked on the winding path to the shrine. Bestia's group might have been faster on foot or riding speeders, but it would have been impossible to cut through enemy forces in time, if at all.

As the group drew near, the state of the shrine complex became more clear. There were scorch marks all over, and pieces of masonry fell off in places. Bestia thought she'd spotted a hole blown straight through one of the walls. She shook her head. At least Calphayus's blindness spared him the sight. His Force visions might not.

"People from all over the galaxy used to come to Voss to visit the shrine of healing." Theron's somber voice came over the communicator. "Now look at it."

They ascended the final stretch of the path, and came to the entrance. A Zakuulan walker stood there, facing them. It looked more advanced than the ones Bestia had encountered before. Its weapons started glowing, no doubt preparing a devastating attack. Storm Rider and Dragonslayer's cannons blasted away at this final enemy. Bestia was about to climb out and go for the tried and true method of cutting through the machine's legs when it went down and crumpled. The driver made their way out of the debris and disappeared inside the temple. A shrill scream rang out moments later.

Bestia jumped out of the walker and peeked inside, only to be met with several pairs of glowing faceted eyes. The droid handler's body lay a few steps away from the entrance. The Voss brandished their weapons at Bestia.

"I'm with the Alliance!" She yelled.

The weapons lowered a bit. The rest of Bestia's group caught up with her. Calphayus nearly tripped on a piece of debris. They were led inside, and Bestia saw more Voss, along with members of that feline reptilian species.

"Never thought I'd see Voss and Gormak fight together." Theron muttered.

Ah, so the other ones were Gormak, Voss's other native sentient species. The two had been at odds since the dawn of Voss history. Recently it has been discovered that the two species had more in common than previously thought: the Voss were actually Gormak, altered by the Force. It did little to solve the tensions between the two. Until a common enemy forces the two species to work together, like it did with the Empire and the Republic on the grander scale of things. Bestia wondered if the truce would last after Zakuul was dealt with.

"I don't find it THAT odd. Not as odd as, say, a Dread Master working with the Empire and the Republic. Everyone is sick of Zakuul's bullshit and wants to survive."

Theron nodded. They walked in silence for a few moments, until Bestia approached one of the Voss that met the group at the entrance. She was dressed in robes embroidered with gold constellations, now dull from the dust and grime.

"Excuse me, do you work here?"

The Voss nodded.

"Have you seen anything unusual happen recently? I'm trying to figure out what Zakuul wants with Voss and this place specifically."

The healer paused, deep in thought.

"An outsider woman arrived shortly before the attack. She had a mangled body with her. She begged us to heal her son, but we cannot heal the dead."

"What did she look like?"

"A human, I think. Very pale. Dark hair, and blue eyes. I've never seen eyes like that on a human outsider. They almost glowed. The body of her son was completely mangled but he had an artificial limb. The outsiders attacked shortly after, and she could no longer leave. The healers let her bury her child in one of the gardens."

Bestia's eyes went wide as it clicked. This must have been Senya. She probably brought Arcann here hoping the healers could save him. They couldn't. Arcann was long dead, and Senya buried him here on Voss. Her presence was likely the reason for the attack, Vaylin going after the last remaining member of her family.

Bestia thanked the healer and ran to find the rest of her group.

"I know why Zakuul is here. I think." She announced.

Lana and Theron stared at her. They and Calphayus sat on some intact chairs in a side room.

"Senya is here. And Vaylin is likely after her." Bestia's voice was tinged with guilt.

"So now what?" Theron asked.

"We could try to get her to come back to the Alliance..." Lana mused.

"I don't think she'll want any part of the Alliance if I'm around..." Bestia looked down at the cracked floor tiles. "I suppose I could try apologizing. After that it's up to her."

"I will go with Bestia." Calphayus said.

"We will assist the Voss and Gormak forces. Give you time to deal with this one way or another."

Bestia and Calphayus crept along a ruined corridor. It was quiet this deep underground, the fighting far away. Bestia's heart was heavy. Before this, the death she and the other Dread Masters caused across the galaxy seemed somewhat distant. Now she wondered how many families she'd torn apart. And she wanted the destruction to end. Calphayus suddenly stopped, holding out a hand.

"I sense a presence ahead. So much grief and anger. Be careful." He whispered.

Now that he mentioned it, Bestia could sense it too. An angry, cornered presence in a chamber somewhere ahead. This must be Senya. Guilt stabbed through Bestia's soul.

"Do you think she'll listen?"

"I'm afraid not. But it shouldn't stop you from saying your piece. For your own sake. Let her know that it was not your intention to kill the child."

"Yeah. Let's go."

They found Senya in a courtyard inside the temple. She sat on her knees before a fresh grave, with a carved gravestone at its head. The moment Bestia and Calphayus stepped out of the tunnel, Senya sprung to her feet, lightsaber in hand.

"Came to dig up my son's body and finish eating it, beast?!"

She charged at Bestia, who raised her lightsabers to parry. Senya put so much strength and fury into that one strike, that Bestia had to put considerable effort into parrying. She Force-pushed Senya away.

"No. I came to apologize."

Senya attacked again, this time Calphayus stepped in and blocked her attack with his staff.

"You have full right to not forgive Bestia. I know if someone killed her, I would have never forgiven them."

He stepped out of the way of another strike. "Please. Hear her out."

Bestia jumped in, driving Senya away from her father.

"I lost control!"

"And you tore apart every person on that ship like a rabid beast!"

"I did. There's no use denying that. And you endangered an innocent planet by coming here."

Senya paused for a moment. There was remorse in Bestia's voice. But she couldn't forgive Arcann's senseless death. In her eyes, Bestia was a threat, not only to her, but to Zakuul and the galaxy as a whole. And this monster had the absolute gall to come here and accuse Senya of endangering the planet. Like Bestia's own presence wasn't a threat to Voss, possibly even more so than Zakuul was. Even though Senya wasn't officially a Knight of Zakuul anymore, she still held the values of one. Bestia could turn into a rabid monster at any moment, and a Knight's job was to protect the innocent from criminals and monsters. At least, that's what Senya believed. Under Arcann and Vaylin's rule, the Knights became the exact thing that she swore to protect people from. But she didn't want to think about that right now. Right now, Senya had a dragon to slay.

Senya was about to attack Bestia again, but a humming sound made both of them look up. A Zakuulan dropship hovered above, spewing skytroopers and knights. They were led by one of the Horizon Guard as they jumped into the courtyard. Bestia looked at them, then at Senya, and made a decision.

"Go. We'll fight them off."

Senya stared at her, dumbstruck. Then she turned on her heels, and disappeared into a hallway. Bestia and Calphayus cut through the Skytroopers easily, and dealt with the Knights, until only the Horizon Guard remained. He charged at the two Dread Masters, and Bestia let out a Force-enhanced roar, staggering him. To her annoyance, the Guard withstood the Force Fear she laced into the roar. Still, it slowed him down, and gave her room to attack. She just had to hold the Guard's attention long enough. So she did, yelling and attacking until she saw

Calphayus materialize behind the Guard, and a cyan lightsaber blade erupted from the Guard's chest.

"I hate doing this." Calphayus muttered as the dead guard crumpled to the floor. "But, I volunteered to come here. This was expected."

Bestia patted his shoulder gently. A shadow fell over her, and she looked up, expecting another Zakuul vessel. Instead, she saw a long triangular ship that she immediately recognised as an imperial destroyer.

"What's the Empire doing here?" She muttered. Her holocom beeped.

"Lana? What's going on?"

"The Empire showed up and helped us rout Zakuulan forces. The new Empress wishes to speak to you. I understand you know each other."

"Oh, for fuck's sake, don't tell me it's..."

The image hovering above the communicator changed from Lana to another woman. A human. Even through the blue tinge of the hologram, Bestia could tell she was pale and had dark hair pulled back into a large bun. She sneered when she made out the woman's face.

"Acina."

"It's Empress Acina now. What a surprise to see one of your kind, Dread Master."

Bestia rolled her eyes, and took a deep breath.

"I suppose I have to thank you for your assistance. Which, thank you."

She tried to sound as sincere as she could. She wasn't sure if she succeeded. Empress Acina, formerly Darth Acina, was a major thorn in the Dread Masters' side some years ago. Long ago, the Emperor built a storage facility for various Sith artifacts. The Dread Masters were involved in the construction, especially Brontes with her detailed knowledge of Sith artifacts and how to

contain them. After the facility was completed, Brontes and her apprentices oversaw it up until the Dread Masters were captured and imprisoned over thirty years ago. Acina was one of those apprentices. When they were freed, Brontes visited the facility, only to find Acina in charge, and unwilling to step down. The betrayal hurt. The facility held a lot of Bestia and Styrak's research too, and they had to steal it back later on. On top of everything, Acina also had Brontes's research expunged from the library of the Sith Academy on Korriban.

"Be glad you didn't dial Brontes, your majesty," Bestia said.

"I will take note of that. I would like to discuss an Alliance against Zakuul."

"Uhhh, sure." Bestia saw Calphayus give her a thumbs up.

"Come to Dromund Kaas as soon as you are able. We'll discuss the terms in person."

The holocall ended. Bestia let out a loud groan.

"Who does she think she is? Empress, my ass. Now I have to attend some stupid official gathering."

"You sound a lot like Styrak."

"Well yeah, he has the right idea about staying away from people sometimes. Also, I don't even have any nice clothes!"

Calphayus put a hand on Bestia's shoulder.

"It's going to be okay. I don't sense any hostility from her in the future, but I do sense danger."

"Of course there is danger. Let's go back to Lana and Theron. Maybe they'll have some plan or another."

Zakuul had retreated from Voss, but the victory was bittersweet. A huge part of Voss-Ka, the capital, was gone, along with massive damages to the rest of the city and surrounding areas. Senya disappeared once again, leaving her son's grave behind. Bestia knew there would not be

forgiveness for her, but to her, knowing that was better than the uncertainty. Knowing that someone hated your guts was in itself a form of closure.

And now, Bestia had a damn diplomatic meeting to attend.

The Nexu, the Witch, and the audacity of this Sith

Chapter Summary

Bestia takes part in some aggressive negotiations.

Bestia sat on the bed, combing through her wavy bright red hair. She just washed it, and getting out all the soot and grime of the previous excursion to Voss has proven quite a challenge. A communicator sat by, and images of three other Dread Masters hovered above it. Brontes seethed. Tyrans appeared impassive and had his feet up on a table. Calphayus was his usual placid self. Styrak sat next to Bestia. She grumbled in frustration at a particularly stubborn snarl in her hair. Styrak moved closer.

"Let me help."

Bestia sighed in defeat and handed him the comb. "Thank you. I really don't want to go to this audience."

"You are starting to sound like me."

"You're the second person saying that in the past few days."

Styrak took the comb from her and settled into brushing through small segments of Bestia's hair. Bestia stared at the other Dread Masters.

"My former apprentice now rules the Empire." Brontes said coldly. "All according to the Sith code, I suppose. It does not make her takeover of Arcanum sting any less, but I can somewhat admire the audacity."

"She sounded amicable enough." Calphayus said.

"She claims to want to join forces with the damn Alliance. Which is why I have to go to Dromund Kaas. You know, the capital of the Empire that still wants all of us dead, and talk to her like a good little figurehead." Bestia spat. "I hate the fact that I have to do all this shit just to get yet another obstacle out of my way to fight Vitiate. What an absolute waste of time."

"I hate to say it, but right now it's the most viable course of action from a tactical standpoint." Tyrans shrugged. Brontes glared at him. "So, no. It's not a waste of time."

"Yeah, you're right. It makes sense to unite against a common enemy. I mean, us being here is an example of that." Bestia sighed. "I don't even have anything nice to wear. All my dresses and shit were on Oricon."

Everyone fell silent. Oricon was somewhat of a sore subject. The moon was attacked by Zakuul shortly after Bestia left to hunt down Vitiate. The attacking army was mostly droids and other machines, so the Dread Masters' power was ineffective against them. They started to bombard Oricon from orbit, and the Dread Masters and their followers had to scatter.

"Has anyone gone back to Oricon in the five years I was gone?" Bestia asked.

"Yes. We went back to retrieve the Phobis Core, only to find it gone." Brontes said.

"Wait, what?" Bestia lurched forward. Styrak scrambled after her, nearly dropping the comb. "I thought you guys had all three aboard Deimos?"

"We do now. We just had to fucking extract one out of a museum on Zakuul." Tyrans's holo reclined in a chair, dangerously close to falling over.

"What?"

"Arcann decided to do an absolute galaxy brain move and display a functioning, active Phobis Device that also had a very salty ghost of its creator attached to it, in a bloody museum."

"THEY DISPLAYED MY MOM IN A MUSEUM?!"

Brontes's holo flinched a bit, as did Styrak.

"In a manner of speaking, yes. Lady Ha'nadi's ghost was as unhappy about the move as you are, so the Device became even more active, and cleared out half the spire. Which made the extraction much easier." Brontes shrugged, ever the pragmatic one. "They were so busy picking up the bodies and the survivors that they didn't notice the Device disappearing. I suspect we have taken quite a burden off that city's shoulders, even if they will never admit it."

"Why'd you have to drop this on me when I don't even have time for the whole story?"

"You never really asked."

"I guess I didn't really have the time and I kinda thought you took the devices when you evacuated. Anyway, what state is Oricon in?"

Would it be worth returning - the unasked question hung in the air. Tyrans and Brontes's faces fell, and they exchanged looks.

"The palace was in ruins, but the fortress complex was largely intact. I suspect that the lower levels of the palace and its foundations are intact as well, but we didn't have time to check. We'd have to rebuild before we can return." Brontes said. "Frankly, I'm not sure if it's worth it. It would take enormous amounts of money and resources to restore everything. Much more than during the conflict with the Republic and the Empire. The resources and money we might not have, and that could be used better in building a base in a new, uncompromised location. Tell me, do you truly have that much of an attachment to the place?"

There was a long silence as Bestia pondered Brontes's question. Deep down she knew they could no longer go home. Was Oricon even home at all? It was at least the closest thing to one. Bestia had lived there for centuries. It's where her mother was buried. It's where she married Styrak, and raised Mu'hass. Even though Oricon hadn't been her choice, and Raptus had insisted on building it on the bones of slaves, it had become the closest thing to home Bestia had ever known. And she suspected the other Dread Masters felt the same. But at the same time, she never felt at peace there. The last time she felt at peace was back on Ziost, before her mother died. And that was something she could never go back to.

"I don't know. Is... is mother's tomb intact?" Bestia finally asked. She noticed Calphayus tense up.

"It is. And her holocron is embedded into the Phobis Core. Her Force ghost has been quiet since we took the Device back, though."

Bestia's mother, Ha'nadi, was the first Dread Master before Bestia and the others. She had traveled to Oricon, and created the Phobis Devices. She claimed the idea came to her in a vision from an entity she called the Dread God. Still, the Devices were her own invention. She never really paused to consider how the Devices would be used. She simply made them because she could, and because she believed she should have. Vitiate took note of her talents, and together they stood at the beginnings of the current iteration of the Sith Empire. Ha'nadi received funding for her project, and was content working on it.

Until...

She married a relatively low born half-human half-Sith named Calphayus. That angered Vitiate, for he saw her as his potential Empress. She rejected him. And doomed herself and her family.

Bestia froze as the ancient memory replayed itself in her mind. She was a child back then, entering her teens. She'd come back from her studies at the Sith Academy, and upon entering her home, she found Vitiate standing over Ha'nadi's body. A shadow rose from her, and darted towards Bestia, and she blacked out. She started having destructive fits of berserker rage after that. The fits were thought to be nothing more than a trauma response, and therapy helped somewhat at least until Bestia was enrolled in the Sith Academy and her ferocity was encouraged.

"Are you alright?" Styrak asked.

"Yeah. Just remembering things."

"Do you want braids?"

"Sure."

Styrak nodded and got to work. He was silent for a while, and then asked the question that has been nagging him.

"Have you seen any of my Kell Dragons?"

"We haven't, but we didn't have time to do a full sweep of what was left of the palace." Brontes said.

"Would it be possible to send a team to retrieve them?"

"Zakuul is pretty distracted right now. It could work." Bestia scratched her head. "But it would have to be Dread Guards. I don't want the Alliance there. Do we even have any Dread Guard left?"

"We do, but not that many. It would be enough for that specific task though." Tyrans tapped something into his datapad. "Just, don't get your hopes up, big guy. They might be dead, or Zakuul might have grabbed them. It's been five years."

"I understand." Styrak sighed.

"Then it is decided, we sit back and let the Alliance throw their lot with the Empire. Meanwhile we send a group of Dread Guard to Oricon to see if Styrak's dragons are still around. Maybe we should be on the down low so the Empress doesn't demand our heads on stakes as a peace offering." Tyrans summed up.

Bestia nodded. Styrak braided her hair. He enjoyed doing that, it was soothing to him, and a quiet display of care and affection to Bestia. The style he went for was typical for the area of Ziost he was from: paired braids running along sides of the head. The top was left unbraided, and all the hair was gathered into a large ponytail. However this time, instead of leaving the ponytail loose, it was braided as well.

"I think I'll tell Lana to keep an eye out. She and Theron are going with me. I don't really get why my presence is even necessary. Lana could lead the Alliance, she's far less controversial than I am."

"She needs a flashy figurehead. You know that." Tyrans said.

"Well, Sharack is right there, then. Why not have the fabled Hero of Tython lead the charge? I guess Lana could have picked me because I don't care about taking over and Sharack wasn't available at the time. At least she doesn't have to deal with Raptus. He'd be crawling all over the Alliance like one of those beetles that kept eating dad's garden."

Calphayus groaned, and the twins chuckled at the comparison. Raptus absolutely would have taken over as soon as even a sliver of power was within his reach.

"Has there been any news on him, by the way?"

"Nope." Tyrans said. "Nothing. Void. Null."

"Have you even looked at all?" Bestia narrowed her eyes at him.

"I have." Brontes cut in. "There really is nothing. There was a rumor coming from Zakuul that he was seen pledging himself to Arcann, but it was simply a rumor. There are no Dread Guards among the forces of Zakuul. It does match that vision you've mentioned, though."

Bestia nodded, and fell silent. After a while, Styrak finished Bestia's hair, and sat back admiring his handiwork.

"Thank you." Bestia said.

"You are most welcome."

Bestia sighed as she put on her usual robe and powered down the communicator.

"This is stupid." She muttered.

Styrak hummed in agreement.

Bestia walked around the bed and hugged him. He hugged her back.

"Be careful." He said.

"I will."

A hyperspace jump later, and they were landing in Kaas city. The Empress gave them a private landing pad. Bestia looked out of the shuttle window. It was raining, the typical weather for this area of the planet. Long ago, the Sith Emperor conducted a ritual that turned parts of the atmosphere into a constant churning thunderstorm. Since then, Kaas city has grown and adapted to the new climate, harnessing the lightning strikes for energy.

They had a welcoming committee it seemed: a shady-looking human in a white uniform, flanked by two soldiers. One of them was holding an umbrella over the man. Bestia saw both Theron and Lana scowl at the sight. No one offered them umbrellas when they stepped off the shuttle.

"Honoured guests! Welcome to Dromund Kaas!"

Bestia gave him her best Sith Lord scowl.

"Who are you?"

"Moff Lorman." Theron said.

"It's Minister Lorman now!" The human protested.

He sounded exactly as annoying as Bestia thought he would.

"This welcome is the most pathetic thing I've ever seen. Just take us to the throne room, Lorman."

"It's MINISTER Lorman!"

Bestia let a tiny sliver of her power loose towards the human. He started fidgeting and looking around as he scurried towards the Citadel entrance. At least it shut him up. Styraak would have hated this guy, Bestia thought. She made sure to shake herself off next to him when they got out of the rain, reveling in the impotent rage emanating from him.

"Keep an eye out." Bestia whispered to Lana while Lorman was busy fussing over the water stains on his uniform. Both Theron and Lana nodded.

They entered the throne room. It wasn't THE throne room, that one was sealed by Vitiate himself and out of reach of everyone except him and those he allowed to enter. No, this throne room was different. It held several seats arranged on the sides of it, with one seat on an elevation opposite of the entrance. Large windows opened up onto the city, the view blurred by the torrents of water. A huge Imperial crest hung above the throne, six arrows pointing outward from a center, forming a hexagon shape. The same symbol featured on the red banners hung on the walls.

Acina stood up from the throne when Bestia, Theron, and Lana entered. She was a regal human woman, pale with dark brown hair in a large braided bun on the back of her head. She wore a red coat that shimmered in a hexagonal pattern. Probably some high tech cloth or another, Bestia thought. It would fit with all the odd glowing rods that decorated the Empress's outfit. She dismissed Lorman with a nod.

"Welcome, Commander. Strange times, are they not? I would never imagine I'd negotiate with a Dread Master. Give Lord Brontes my regards when you see her next."

The Nexu, the Witch, and the absolute audacity of that bitch, Bestia thought, somewhat in awe. She couldn't even be angry.

"Man. Didn't think I'd see this place again." She said, looking around.

"Would you like a private tour?" Acina asked.

Bestia's hackles rose. Acina wanted to separate Bestia from the group, and Bestia didn't like it one bit. From the looks on her companions' faces, she gathered they felt the same.

"It's not wise to split up." Lana protested.

She was right. Splitting up was a horrible idea, and not just in all the horror holos Bestia and the Dread Masters watched for laughs. But, in the end, Bestia chose to take the plunge. Acina was a Dread Master's apprentice once, but only an apprentice. If they fought one on one, Bestia was fairly certain she could defeat the Empress.

"I know." Bestia finally replied. "I can handle myself. And keep an eye on that Lorman guy. I don't like him."

Lorman started another fit, trying to drive his new title into the minds of people who clearly didn't care. Lana and Theron watched him impassively until he calmed down.

"We'll be fine, Commander." Theron finally said.

They were escorted into a waiting room. Bestia followed Acina to another landing pad, and they boarded a shuttle. Acina sat in the pilot's seat, Bestia next to her. Thunder rumbled above. The

rain grew stronger since Bestia's arrival. The shuttle took off and Bestia watched the city soon give way to the jungle.

"So, how is Lord Brontes?"

"Pissed off at you stealing the facility that WE designed and helped build. How about this: the Alliance helps the Empire get rid of Zakuul, and then the Empire hands the Arcanum to the Alliance?"

Might as well match the audacity. Lightning flashed outside, followed almost immediately by a peal of thunder. Kaas pilots were used to the conditions, and there were lightning rods all over the place, but still, this wasn't the safest weather for a flight.

"You mean, the Empire hands the Arcanum to the Dread Masters."

"Yep. We are part of the Alliance, after all."

"You do realise that I'm within my full right to have the Alliance hand the Dread Masters over once Zakuul is defeated?"

"Are you though? I'm the Alliance Commander."

"Oh, please. We all know Lord Beniko runs everything."

Bestia had to admit: Acina got her there. Before she could form a witty comeback, there was an explosion, and the shuttle spun wildly out of control. Bestia grabbed onto the nearest thing. Acina frantically hailed the Citadel on the communicator, but there was no reply. The ground was rushing towards them with frightening speed. Bestia got up, grabbed the Empress, and jumped towards the back of the shuttle. She gave the hatch a Force powered kick, tearing it out of its frame, and the two jumped out, moments before the shuttle crashed behind them, and slid off the cliff into the valley below. Bestia rolled and then leapt to her feet, lightsabers at the ready.

"So you did want to kill me!" She yelled, ready to fight.

"The crash would have killed us both!" Acina yelled back.

Bestia's rage withered somewhat under the weight of common sense. Acina was right. She lowered her lightsabers a tiny fraction, but didn't power them off.

"I could accuse you of the same." Acina glared at Bestia.

And she was, again, right. The Dread Masters had a motive, after all.

"I did just carry your ass out of that shuttle, Your Highness. And, as you pointed out, the crash would have killed us both."

Bestia decided to tactfully omit the fact that she had much better chances of surviving the crash due to being more resilient than a human, even a Sith Lord. Instead, she looked around. They stood on the edge of a cliff. It dropped into a forested valley, and the walls would be too sheer to climb down. In the other direction opened a path leading away into the jungle. Trees and vines obscured Bestia's vision, and the rain fell hard, lowering the visibility further.

Suddenly, a smell of ozone permeated the air. Bestia bolted from the spot, and saw Acina follow in her peripheral vision. They sprinted along the path for a few moments. A flash of light erupted behind them, followed by a deafening crack of thunder. It took Bestia a few seconds to get her bearings, and when she looked to where they stood just a few seconds ago, she saw a patch of charred stone.

"We should get out of the open." She stated, walking down the path.

"There's an emergency beacon in the shuttle. If we reach the crash site, we can use it to call for help. And if help comes, that's where it will be."

Bestia nodded, and surveyed her surroundings again. The path they were on led away from the cliff's edge, and away from where the shuttle should have crashed. But, right now, it was the only option. Maybe further down there would be a trail leading down into the valley, Bestia thought. Another crack of thunder, far too close, interrupted her thoughts.

"Is there any way down?" Bestia asked.

"I'm not quite familiar with this area of the jungle."

Of course the Empress wasn't. Bestia edged closer to the cliff, sideways to keep an eye on the Empress. The wall was steep, but Bestia noticed weathered stone pillars, and remnants of pavement.

"It looks like there's an old path down. But it's very damaged. We'll have to Force jump our way across."

"I suppose it would be boring if we found a fully paved road." The Empress said.

"Mind the rocks. They're slippery." Bestia advised.

Back in the Citadel, Theron and Lana were escorted to a waiting room. As soon as the guards left, Theron made his way to the computer terminal and was typing hurriedly at the keyboard while a data spike was inserted into a port nearby. Lana settled on the plush rug, and closed her eyes in meditation. Some time passed, and suddenly, a presence entered her awareness. Her eyes snapped open.

"Someone's coming."

Theron immediately unplugged the data spike and closed all the windows on the terminal screen. He moved to stand casually by the opposite wall. The Empire didn't need to know about his snooping around.

The doors slid open with a hiss, and the familiar Imperial in white uniform entered. It didn't escape either Theron nor Lana how Lorman schooled his face into a sad one just seconds after entering.

"I come bearing grim news." He paused for effect, his face still remarkably not sad. "The Empress's shuttle has been sabotaged. Her emergency beacon isn't transmitting which can only mean one thing: the shuttle disintegrated. The Empress, and the Commander are gone. I'm sorry for your loss."

Theron and Lana exchanged looks. It was clear that Lorman wasn't really telling the truth. But also Bestia and the Empress have been gone for a while. If Bestia was dead, then there were four Dread Masters mad with grief and pain from the damaged Force Bond to deal with. And they'd know about it by now. No, Bestia was tougher than that. As was the Empress.

Bestia landed onto the cracked pavement and rolled away from the chasm. She got up, and watched Acina jump too. The Empress's landing was a more graceful one. They were at last back on solid ground, the valley extending before them. Bestia could see smoke rising from behind the trees ahead. A bolt of lightning struck disturbingly close, followed immediately by a thunderclap. Bestia eyed the flooded path before them. Then her gaze fell onto weathered stone pyramids ahead.

"We could take shelter in the ruins." Bestia said. "We'll probably have a better chance of navigating the jungle when it's not being actively flooded."

"We don't know how long the storm will last." Acina said. "The sooner we find the crash, the sooner we'll be out of here."

"Then I suggest we cross this flooded section of the path as fast as we can. You don't want to be in water when lightning strikes nearby."

They dashed across the shallow water. It was a miracle that neither of them slipped. Acina lifted the soiled hem of her coat and looked at it with distaste. Bestia's coat was in a similar state. So much for having had it washed the day before.

Soon, Bestia saw black smoke rising from behind a nearby ruin. She and Acina crept towards the source of it until they came to an opening in the rocks. Bestia peered out from behind the rock. Before her was the crashed shuttle, resting against a pile of dirt and rocks it had kicked up in its fall. Thick smoke was rising from the remnants of the vessel. And then Bestia spotted some movement among the debris. It was only a small flicker, gone as soon as she noticed it. She ducked behind the rocks and looked around cautiously.

"I think someone's there."

"Whoever sabotaged the ship?"

"Could be. Could be just some curious animal though. In any case, we should be careful."

The two Sith moved into the crash site. Bestia kept her head on a swivel, and her lightsabers on the ready. She could sense a faint presence, but couldn't pinpoint it. Just as they approached, there was a shifting noise on the ruined ship above. Bestia raised her lightsaber in time to block a blaster bolt and quickly found the source. A tall bald human woman stood on top of the wreck, with several Hunter-Killer droids backing her.

"Slogging through the forest was going to be the worst part of the job. It's so much easier when the prey comes to us." The woman said in a very raspy voice.

"Prey?" Bestia snarled, her mask coming into existence around her face. "I don't think so."

"The Genoharadan fear no one! Not even you."

"Is that a challenge?" Bestia raised a hand and let black and red energy fly towards the enemy. The assassin staggered, gritting her teeth. Her droids were unaffected, but they were easy to deal with.

"Empress, deal with the droids. I will deal with the assassin."

"You presume to order me?" Acina asked, indignant.

Bestia grunted, and charged at the assassin before she could recover.

"Empress, we don't have time for this!"

A bolt of electricity hit Bestia as she sprinted, bringing her to a halt for a moment. She growled and looked around, spotting a small floating droid some distance away. It was continuously zapping her. However, it was nothing compared to what Bestia had endured under Vitiate. She grit her teeth, and threw one of her lightsabers at it, destroying it. She was running towards the assassin once again as she recalled the lightsaber back to her.

In Bestia's periphery, Acina blinked in and out of view, stabbing and slicing through the HK droids. Bestia bore down onto the assassin, pummeling away at her shields. This was a challenging fight. The assassin recovered from the fear attacks quickly, similar to the Zakuul knights, and her shields were about the toughest Bestia has encountered so far.

Bestia jumped out of the way of a flamethrower blast, and for a tiny moment, she saw the assassin's shield waver. It was running out of power! At the same moment, she saw Acina

appear out of thin air next to the assassin, stabbing at the weak spot. The purple blade went through the assassin's chest, and she collapsed.

"That was a good one." Bestia said. "Let's go find that beacon."

They combed through the wreckage until Acina stopped before a device half buried in the mud. She examined it with a frown.

"The beacon has been destroyed. Help is not coming."

"Of course it isn't." Bestia grumbled.

She walked over to the assassin and went through her pockets. She probably wasn't alone, and maybe there was something that could tell Bestia where other assassins were.

"I frankly thought the Genoharadan were a myth."

"They aren't. They tried to kill me and other Dread Masters a few times. And they are never alone. Especially with powerful targets like us."

She fished out a small datapad from one of the assassin's pouches. She activated it, and went through the contents.

"Oh look. They have a camp nearby. I think we should pay them a visit."

Theron paced around the room. Lana ceased her meditation, but was alert. Something beeped, and Theron walked over to the holocom, a scowl on his face as he recognised the frequency. A

translucent image of an older Twi'lek woman appeared above the projector. Saresh, the former leader of the Galactic Republic. Still very much in power, but from behind the scenes.

"I heard the news." She said, folding her hands. Even with the distortions, she didn't sound particularly upset. Theron's scowl intensified. "I offer my condolences. A horrible loss, I'm sure."

Lana came to stand by Theron's side. She noticed a fleeting scowl on the Twi'lek's face.

"The Commander is missing, not dead." Theron said.

"We'd have to deal with four Dread Masters mad with grief and disrupted Force bonds if she was."

"Don't blind yourselves with hope. The Alliance is leaderless, and someone has to fill the void."

"That someone being you, I presume." Lana crossed her arms.

Saresh nodded smugly.

"It's obvious that the Commander was a figurehead. The Alliance needs true leadership to defeat Vaylin."

"Hard pass. I've had enough of you."

"You will realize I'm right. Then, we can talk again."

The call ended.

The rain kept falling, and the wind howled as Bestia and Acina made their way along a ravine towards the assassin camp. Bestia could swear the storm has grown worse, and she was

concerned that the ravine could get flooded. Still, it was the only way forward, so she hurried along. At least the storm would cover their approach and wash away any tracks.

Thunderstorms were a constant around Kaas city, and most of the planet. Long ago, the Sith Emperor's rituals in a temple near the city have disrupted the planet's atmosphere and created a constant storm in the area. It hasn't abated in a thousand years, a testament to the emperor's power. In time, people of Dromund Kaas adapted to their new, much wetter and more perilous climate, and even figured out how to harness lightning strikes for energy. It was all well and good when you were inside with a cup of hot tea and not trudging through the jungle towards a camp full of people paid to kill you.

The Genoharadan camp was set up in front of a Sith tomb, shielded on one side by the building and on the other by the cliffs. Several tents sat around the plaza. Peeking out from behind a rock, Bestia could only see a few patrolling droids milling about.

"Looks like they're all away looking for us elsewhere." She said. "Let's get in and see if we find out who sent them."

Bestia quickly knocked out a nearby sentry droid, and gestured to Acina. They snuck into one of the tents. Acina stood guard at the entrance while Bestia rummaged around.

"Your fighting skills are good."

"Yeah. Thanks." Bestia said. "There's nothing here."

She reached out and used the Force to pull another sentry droid in, impaling it on her lightsaber.

"I'm better at it than talking. And I'm better off in the wild than in a palace."

She darted to another, larger tent. Acina followed.

"Maybe I've been married to Styraak for so long his dislike for people is rubbing off on me, but I'd rather deal with beasts any day. Beasts are straightforward."

She spotted something sitting on a table and went over. It was a datapad, and somehow, it wasn't protected with a password. Bestia unlocked it, and it started playing a recording right away. The owner probably left in a hurry. An image of an older Twi'lek woman appeared, an angry scowl on her face.

"I want that Dread Master scum blown to pieces, and I want to see the bodies! No bodies, no payment!" She yelled.

Bestia's jaw hung open. Acina frowned.

"Saresh? The former chancellor of the Republic?"

"The bloody snake." Acina spat. "There were rumors that she consorted with Genoharadan, but..."

"Guess they're not." Bestia sighed. "It looks like they're targeting both of us. Me because she hates me and the Dread Masters. You because you're the Empress. Someone had to feed her information about our meeting though."

"Well, now we know who to blame for everything." Acina looked around. "I suppose a shuttle was too much to ask for."

A humming noise distracted them from the recording. It started somewhere behind the nearby ridge, and as the two Sith watched, a ship rose into the air, its guns trained on them. Bestia grabbed Acina by the coat, and the two darted towards the tomb entrance, the only hiding spot they saw. Blaster bolts impacted the stone just behind them as they dove into the tomb and rolled down a flight of stairs. The entrance collapsed behind them.

"You wanted a shuttle?" Bestia asked sarcastically.

Theron and Lana stood in the elevator on their way down the Citadel. They had to find out what happened to Bestia. There was a familiar beep, and moments later they were looking at Bey'wan, the general of the Alliance. He was clearly panicked and confused, his ears flat against his head.

"Saresh is coming here and there are rumors the Commander is dead!"

"Send her packing as soon as she lands." Theron said. "The Commander is not dead, just missing, and we're going to get to the bottom of it!"

"Some of the troops want to hear her out. They aren't sure about the previous Commander and her... Sith friends."

While the Dread Masters kept to themselves, some in the Alliance weren't happy with one being in charge. Or with their presence in general. There were people who still remembered the Dread War, and a few who took part, and were scarred by the mental attacks of the Dread Masters. Theron wasn't part of the operation, but he shared their doubts. Still, if he had to choose between Bestia and Saresh... he hated to admit it but he'd pick the Dread Master.

"There are... rumors." Bey'wan started, fidgeting a bit. "About the way Arcann died."

"Remind them what we're fighting against." Lana said, her face impassive.

"And stall Saresh!" Theron added.

Before he could interrogate Lana about the rumors Bey'wan was referring to, the lift doors opened. Several guns were pointed at the pair. Lana scowled, while Theron raised his arms in the air in surrender.

"You better know what you're doing..." Lana whispered to him.

The two Sith crept through the quiet tomb. They found themselves in an antechamber that led to a flight of stairs going down, deeper into the crypt. Faint lights illuminated the place, dim after many centuries. They failed to banish the darkness from the corners, but gave Bestia enough light to see clearly. Debris littered the stone floors. Bestia moved a piece of stonework away with her foot and found tentacle motifs decorating the tiles below. They seemed familiar somehow.

Bestia stepped lightly down the stairs, watching her environment intently. This was a Sith tomb after all, and no self respecting Sith tomb was without traps. Especially if it was built by who Bestia suspected it was.

A plate shifted under her step, and she jumped back as sharp spikes emerged from the walls. Sparks of electricity flickered along the spikes, before they retracted back into the walls.

"I'm pretty sure Brontes built this." Bestia said, torn between awe and the grim realisation that she and Acina would have to navigate all this.

It took the Empress a while to reply. No doubt she was rustling up memories of being Brontes's apprentice.

"Spike traps are one of the most common types found inside Sith tombs. What makes you think Lord Brontes authored this one?"

"Tentacle ornaments on the floor. Same style as the Dark Temple by Kaas City, and same style we got back on Oricon. Also, a spike trap doesn't need to be electrified. Spikes on their own are more than enough. And yet Brontes always combined things."

Acina nodded, her face sour. Brontes didn't quite reveal her secrets to her apprentices. Or maybe Acina forgot. That thought disturbed the Empress. To forget something like that was complacency, and complacency had no place in the life of a Sith Lord, much less a self proclaimed Empress.

Bestia peered into the corridor ahead. She noted a few more floor tiles that looked somewhat off, as well as the decorative bands of metal that ran alongside the center and edges of the corridor. They were seamless, unlike the tiles.

"There are a few more trapped sections of the floor ahead, but I think if we go along the metal band in the middle, we should be fine."

Acina nodded, and followed Bestia's lead. They shuffled along the center of the corridor, avoiding the tiles where possible. The passageway took them down, into a chamber partly flooded with water. A tentacled beast slept in the middle.

"Yeah, definitely Brontes's work." Bestia whispered. "I wonder how much the owner of the tomb paid her."

"How are we to get past this beast?"

"It's asleep. We can sneak past. Also, I can pacify it."

Bestia reached out with the Force towards the sleeping beast. She deepened its slumber, and the two Sith crept past it.

"Didn't want to hurt one of Brontes's pets. Even though she probably forgot she put it here."

"Hm. The way you act now is a far cry from what I remember from my apprenticeship days."

Bestia sighed. Of course Acina had built up an image of Bestia in her head.

"We were at war. Also, my bloodlust doesn't extend to animals if it can be helped."

"Does it extend to slaves?"

Bestia froze. Not this shit again. How did Acina even know of an incident from a thousand years ago? Oh wait, the Empire hailed it as some sort of a heroic feat. Even though it was anything but.

"I am not discussing that." She growled, the tiniest edge of a threat in her voice. It was enough to shut the Empress up.

They entered a large room with a gilded tomb in the center. Several skeletons lay around it, twisted and broken. Even though they no longer had any flesh left on the bones, they looked like they died painfully. Brontes did not mess around when it came to traps. Skirting along the wall, the two Sith reached a smaller passage on the other end. Bestia stopped abruptly, listening. Faint voices drifted down the corridor, too faint to distinguish the words. The tone was that of an argument though.

Bestia and Acina exchanged a glance and crept ahead. The corridor curved a few times, and then opened into a small chamber. Several people stood around, chief of them a very big bald man. He had dark face paint on his face. He was glaring down at another man in a stained white uniform. Acina huffed angrily upon seeing him, too angry to care about the element of surprise they might have had. She stepped into the chamber, Bestia following her.

"Minister Lorman! What is the meaning of this?!"

"Don't you know how rude it is to make me come out here in a storm?" Lorman whined loudly.

"Oh, boo-fucking-hoo." Bestia rolled her eyes. "Do you want to see something that's actually rude?"

She extended a hand with a proudly raised middle finger at him.

"Here. Something for you to actually be mad about before I kill you."

Lorman fumed and turned to his associate.

"We should just seal the passage and trap you here forever!"

"Not an option." The tall man said. "Saresh wants the corpses. And the Dread Master's mask. No bodies - no bonus!"

Bestia growled and raised her hands at both him and Lorman. A torrent of black and red energy blasted them. Lorman crumpled onto the floor, curled up in a fetal position and whimpering. The tall man flinched, but collected himself quickly and raised his weapon.

"Oh it's ON!"

Flames poured from the assassin's weapon, and Bestia jumped to the side and charged at him with her lightsabers. Another stream of fire met her, but she was prepared. She threw her arm forward, a blast of the Force parting the flames. She jumped, and at the same time, commanded the Force to protect her. More fire poured towards her, glancing off the shield. She flew at and then past the assassin and landed behind him. At the same time, the man suddenly stopped, and dropped his weapon. His head slid off his shoulders, and he collapsed to the floor. Lorman, seeing that, scrambled to his feet and bolted for the exit, but in a blink, Bestia was before him and backhanded him halfway across the room.

"You can't kill me!" He squealed. Blood ran down his nose. He fumbled at a communicator at his belt. "If you do, your friends will die!"

With a triumphant grin, he held up the device. An Imperial soldier came into view, only to be lifted off his feet and thrown aside. Lana and Theron appeared. Lorman's grin withered. His only advantage was no more.

"What do we do with you?" Acina circled the sniveling Imperial.

"He's all yours, Highness. Although I'd just kill him and be done with it." Bestia said.

She turned away and left for the tunnel. As she walked, she heard a lightsaber activate behind her. She tensed, fully expecting the Empress to come charging at her. There was a scream, and then it was cut off. Then the sound of a lightsaber blade being extinguished. The Empress did catch up with Bestia, but only for the two of them to leave the tomb and return to the citadel.

The Empress and the Dread Master continued their talks back at the citadel. Theron and Lana were present as well. They all sat in a conference room, the Empress changed into a clean dry set of robes, while Bestia was still stuck filthy and wet. So much for having her robes cleaned and her hair washed, she thought, sipping at the kaf graciously offered by the host.

"I cannot give up the Arcanum." The Empress steepled her fingers. " However, we will join the Alliance against Vaylin."

"That's good." Bestia said.

"Additionally, I am willing to retract the death warrant out for you and other Dread Masters."

Bestia tilted her head to the side, listening. Lana leaned forward a bit, curious. Theron remained outwardly impassive.

"You, the rest of the Dread Masters, and all your associates are hereby sentenced to exile. You are banished from any territories owned by the Empire, unless affiliated with the Eternal Alliance."

Bestia took a long sip of her drink, and then let out a long heavy sigh.

"I suppose this is the best the Dread Masters can hope for. I'm glad you are willing to join the fight against Zakuul, though."

She stood up. Theron and Lana followed suit. Bestia bowed her head, turning to leave.

"We really need to get back to Odessen, Your Highness. Farewell."

The three of them practically ran to the spaceship, and flew back to Odessen as fast as possible.

"I would know if another Dread Master died. Especially my bloody wife." Styrak said. His voice was soft, but carried a threatening edge.

"Do we really need to remind you what happened when Styrak was severed from the collective bond? DO WE?" Brontes circled the former chancellor, floating a foot off the ground.

Saresh could do nothing but stare in abject terror as she was herded away from the microphone by four very pissed Sith Lords older than the oldest records of her family she was able to dig up. The crowd stared at the spectacle as well, the four Dread Masters could sense their uncertainty and fear. They probably expected Saresh to be torn apart in the most gory and gruesome way possible. Instead, Calphayus piped up, holding out a small cup with blue flowers painted on the sides.

"My supposedly dead daughter will be arriving soon." He said, his tone dripping with sarcasm yet remarkably friendly. "In the meantime, would you like some tea?"

Saresh stumbled, and fell on her butt. The four Dread Masters towered over her. There was a commotion at the opposite end of the hangar, and many in the crowd turned with their mouths agape to see the very alive Bestia flanked by Theron and Lana walk out of the elevator. The crowd parted for her. She ascended to the stage and joined the Dread Masters guarding Saresh. The Twi'lek looked up at her, purple eyes full of hate, fear, and anger.

"Surprise! Thought you'd seen the last of me?" Bestia held a middle finger to Saresh's face. Was it immature, coming from an eternal being with almost a thousand years behind her shoulders? Yes. Was it satisfying? Also yes.

"If you're going to kill me, just do it already." Saresh growled.

Bestia took the rude gesture away from the former Chancellor's face. As much as Bestia wanted Saresh out of her hair, she also wanted to try and placate the Republic. Maybe she and the Dread Masters could have some sort of a deal where they'd be left alone. If Sharack managed to broker one at the end of the Dread War, then so could the Bestia. Dread War. A loud name for a conflict that was cut mercifully short by Styrak's return and Sharack being a Jedi and using her admittedly limited diplomatic skills to smooth things over with the Republic. And also hitting on Brontes a lot.

Bestia scanned the crowd. Sharack floated in the back. Their eyes met, and Sharack gave Bestia a thumbs up. Bestia sighed, and shook her head again. She was no Jedi, she would never be, but killing someone in the view of the entire Alliance would be an extremely foolish move.

"No. As tempted as I am to kill you where you stand, I think I'll let your people deal with you. You'll be handed back to the Republic, to be dealt with as they see fit. I'm not a prophet like Calphayus is, but I foresee a jail cell in your future. Possibly even on Belsavis. They have really spacious accommodation, if you behave and don't kill everything around with your mere presence. Trust me, I know." She flashed a grin full of sharp teeth at the former Chancellor as two guards took her away.

Everyone watched. And then people started slowly leaving the hangar and going back to their duties. The Commander wasn't dead, and they had other things to worry about. Bestia picked up one of her braids, still damp. A twig was stuck in it.

"I'm going to take a damn bath. Nothing better fucking happen while I'm gone. Lana, Theron, Tyrans, you're in charge!"

Chapter End Notes

Flipped bird count: 10

Grand Theft Gravestone

Chapter Summary

Shit just keeps happening huh. Vaylin and Scorpio steal the Gravestone. Bestia and Styraak arrive at the scene and help Koth resolve a mess. Rammas has a vision.

Chapter Notes

(Music: Skaen - Ad Cryptum)

Koth was humming a tune while working at replacing some fuses in a wall-mounted box. Tora should have been doing this, but she was nowhere to be found, so Koth had to pick up the slack. He wondered where the blue-haired mechanic even was, when a bout of laughter erupted from a room nearby.

"And I said: **GIT GUD!**" Someone yelled, clearly an ending to some story.

Koth put the tools aside and peeked his head into the room. Tora, his missing mechanic, sat on the floor together with another woman, controllers in hand. A large screen was affixed to the wall, showing a split view of a grim city of spiky buildings. A character stood in the middle of the left half of the screen, while two other characters, one in orange robes, and a monster, were doing circles around them. The right half of the screen was shifting erratically.

"How about you 'git gud' and help me with those fuses?" Koth asked.

"Nah, I'm on break."

Koth let out an exasperated sigh.

"Wanna join us later?" The other girl asked, turning around. "We're playing Dreadborne."

Koth recognised Rammas, one of the Commander's family. She'd befriended Tora, and the two often hung out like this when they had time. Sometimes Shyren, the beastly Scion, would come over, and the three watched holos or destroyed each other in games. Rammas's pitch black eyes unsettled Koth somewhat, but she has always been friendly towards him.

"Maybe later." Something beeped. "I gotta take this."

He withdrew from the room and picked up the communicator. It was a distress call from a small vessel drifting nearby. Koth hurried to the bridge, and activated a tractor beam.

Back in the room, Rammas froze for a moment, nearly letting a giant Dread Seed monster kill her character. She sensed something in the Force, but it was gone, hidden, as soon as she tried to zero in on it. She shrugged, guiding her avatar away from the monster's claws.

"You nearly let the first boss kill you!"

"Yeah sorry, just... sensed something."

"Force nerfshit?"

"Yeah. It's gone now but... I got a bad feeling."

"Watch out, we got a Scion over here!"

Tora's taunts were interrupted by the Dread Seed monster swiping at her character, sending them flying. Rammas cackled, while Tora cursed. Shyren's character jumped on the boss's head, delivering a devastating blow to its head and finishing off its remaining hit points. Rammas made her character jump in place in celebration, while Tora's character respawned nearby. Suddenly, Shyren's avatar blinked out of existence mid jump, and a message popped up at the bottom of the screen.

[cvrsedbeast has disconnected]

"Huh, that's weird." Rammas said.

"I think our holonet died."

"Ugh. It can't be out, I checked the transmitter, like, yesterday."

Rammas sensed the presence again, closer this time. At the same time, there was a burst of static on the ship's intercom system. Koth's voice, yelling about being boarded. Rammas was on her feet in moments, her mind calculating the best course of action. Rammas wasn't sure how many enemies there were, and face to face combat wasn't exactly her strong suit, especially if there were Force users. She was better at hiding and sneaking and being overlooked.

"I think they have a Force user with them. I'm going to hide and see if I can ambush them."

Rammas found an air vent opening, and crawled inside, cloaking her presence at the same time. She saw Tora run off to somewhere through the openings in the grate. Another burst of static and shouting came through the intercom. It was patchy but Rammas made out enough bits and pieces to get the image: the enemy was in the hangar. The Sith drew up a mental map of the ship. The game room was on the middle level of the ship. The hangar was in the lower level. She sighed and started crawling.

Rammas didn't have to crawl far. She made it almost to the elevator when it opened and a powerful Force presence washed over the Sith. The elevator spat out a human woman accompanied by a droid. The human was none other than Vaylin, the reigning Empress of Zakuul. And the droid was Scorpio, the snobby artificial intelligence that betrayed the Alliance to pursue some nebulous goal of her own. Rammas watched with a baited breath as the two passed under the vent she looked out of. This was definitely not a fight Rammas would win, not one on one. Not even with the power of a Dread Master. She crawled away and up, away from the middle level. She'd hide, and try to call Odessen.

A grueling climb up later, Rammas peered into the Monolith Room as she came to call it. A foreboding round chamber somewhere on the upper level of the ship, with an odd stone object sitting in the middle, cables connected to the bottom of it beneath the catwalk. Most of the crew actively avoided the room, unless repairs had to be done. The room was thankfully empty, and Rammas didn't sense Vaylin's presence anywhere nearby. It would make a good ambush site. For some reason, Rammas was sure Vaylin would come here eventually, like seemingly every Force user who ever stepped foot on the ship did. Bestia had said the monolith felt alive and evil. Rammas herself was drawn to it. It felt familiar to her.

She climbed out of the vent, and crouched inside the well running along the edge of the room. She fished out her holocom and put in Bestia's own frequency, feverishly typing away.

The two messages reached Odessen at the same time. Koth's message was more frantic, but filled in some gaps: he locked down the ship controls and hid. He saw his crew herded onto the bridge, and heard them screaming when Vaylin tormented them. Neither he nor Rammas knew why Scorpio was there, though.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY STOLE THE GRAVESTONE?!!!!" Bestia exploded.

"They also kidnapped Koth and his crew." Lana said.

"Yeah that too. And Rammas." Bestia added.

This time it was Styrak's turn to explode, although his outburst was much more tame and quiet compared to Bestia's.

"They what?!"

Lana and Theron flinched, again.

"She was fine as of the time she sent the message." Bestia turned to the two humans. "Styrak kind of adopted her."

Styrak calmed down, but Bestia didn't blame him for the outburst. He developed a sort of a father-daughter relationship with Rammas, and had grown protective of her. That, and Rammas was the sixth Dread Master. She inherited Styrak's part in the union. Bestia and the others kept it a secret as to not expose their least experienced and therefore most vulnerable member. It was easy for anyone even somewhat aware of the Dread Masters to assume Styrak was back in the union. It was easy for people to overlook the tiny woman as the sixth Dread Master as opposed to the giant imposing man who has held the position for the past thousand years as well. And for the most part, he kept doing what he did, while also teaching Rammas as his apprentice.

"I'm coming with you." Styrak said.

"No objections here. Considering Vaylin's presence, the more power we bring, the better. Can we get Sharack for a full family outing?"

Lana shook her head.

"Sharack is helping clean up remnant Zakuulan forces on Voss."

"Guess we'll have to manage without her, then."

The Alliance fleet dropped out of hyperspace at the Gravestone's location. The ancient ship floated in space, and a number of Eternal Fleet vessels hung by. They stayed silent as a small vessel disembarked from Deimos, Dread Masters' flagship. It entered the Gravestone's hangar unimpeded.

"Koth really wasn't kidding about locking down the controls, huh." Bestia muttered, stepping out. Styrak followed her. "It's odd that the Eternal Fleet is quiet. I'm not complaining though."

They found Koth hiding in a tunnel nearby.

"So." Bestia put her hands on her hips. "What's going on?"

"Where is Rammas?" Styrak demanded.

"Vaylin has my crew, but the controls are locked." Koth looked worried and annoyed at the seemingly irrelevant question. "Rammas isn't with them. Probably hiding somewhere. It doesn't matter, if they get around the code we're in huge trouble."

"No shit, they'll have control of the ship."

"It's not just that. Do you know what a quantum bomb is?"

"A what?" Bestia's head tilted to the side.

"If they get around the codes everything in a several thousand kilometer range will go boom."

Bestia stood silent for a moment, then took a deep breath.

"Why in the fucking galaxy did you do that?!"

Koth flinched, both from being yelled at and from Bestia's power that began seeping from her, almost visible to the naked eye. Styrak stepped in, and Bestia walked to the edge of the hangar, fuming. She whipped out her communicator, hoping her message would get through.

"BRONTES! GET THE FLEET OUT OF HERE NOW!"

"There is a way to stop it." It wasn't much of a question. Styrak's voice was remarkably flat, given the situation.

"Of course there is. I'm not stupid."

"That is debatable. Show us how."

While Styrak was grilling Koth, Bestia managed to calm down somewhat, and rejoined their little congregation.

"Okay, where do we go to disarm the bomb? Also, were Vaylin and Scorpio alone?"

"They have Skytroopers with them. I've been able to avoid them, but they might get on our case."

"I'll deal with them." Styrak offered.

"Let's go." Bestia growled. "Let's clean up this mess..."

The first fuse was nearby. Koth set to work on disabling it, and just as he started, a patrol of Skytroopers walked in. Bestia and Styrak dealt with them quickly.

"I could get used to having stupidly powerful Force users keeping me safe." Koth straightened. "Anyway that's the first fuse. The second one is going to be difficult."

"It's on the bridge, isn't it?" Bestia guessed.

"Yep. Where Vaylin and my crew are."

"You have two Dread Masters with you."

"The child and the droid will be focused on us." Styrak said.

Koth glanced at the two of them.

"True. Let's go."

When they reached the bridge, Vaylin and Scorpio were both gone. The crew, however, was tied up on the floor. Koth ran to them, freeing a large bald man with noticeable burns on his body. Bestia recalled the man's name to be Len, and that he was Koth's second in command. Bestia and Styrak took positions on the sides of the door, watching for enemies.

"You alright?" Koth asked Len.

"Don't know..." the man mumbled. He threatened to topple over when Koth freed him.

"We're alive." Tora snapped at him. "Took you long enough."

Koth freed her, and she in turn freed the rest of the crew while Koth worked on the second fuse. Styrak glanced over the room. Like Koth had said, Rammas wasn't here, meaning Vaylin and Scorpio hadn't found her when they rounded up the crew. But the Empress wasn't here either, meaning she could find the new Dread Master any minute. Styrak could sense Vaylin's presence, but it was far away.

"Where are Vaylin and Scorpio?" Bestia called out.

"Probably went out to hunt you." Tora said.

"I don't have time to explain but all of you have to go to the escape pods now." Koth said.

He watched his crew run out. When they were gone, he stood by the console, staring down at the keyboard and the screens. The bridge controls were unlocked. He guessed Scorpio sliced through them. However, something wasn't adding up. If Vaylin and Scorpio went around his

encryption, they should have tripped the bomb. But they clearly haven't. As if answering his silent question, a small image of Scorpio appeared above the console. Koth took a step back. Bestia noticed and stepped in, sneering at the droid.

"What do you want?" Bestia demanded.

"Listen carefully. Time is short."

"Well I don't have time for your six dimensional Pazaak."

"My "six dimensional Pazaak" is keeping you all alive. You are welcome."

Bestia grumbled, but decided to listen.

"We have the same objective. Like you, I wish to save the Gravestone. I lured Vaylin away so you could disable your failsafe."

"Huh. Thanks, I guess." Koth said, still frowning.

"Vaylin has cornered one of yours. I understand you might want to save her too." Scorpio stared right into Bestia's eyes.

"Why are you suddenly so helpful?"

"The Gravestone is the key to everything. And the site of their fight may prove to be your undoing."

Koth's eyes went wide.

"Oh no."

"What?" Bestia turned to him. "Where are they?"

"The creepy monolith room. I hid the bomb there."

Bestia was sprinting off before Koth could even finish. He cursed under his breath and ran after her. Styrak did his best to keep up. They burst into the chamber only to see Rammas thrown against the monolith, sliding down to the floor and leaving a dark smear on its surface. Before Vaylin could gloat, Bestia tackled her to the ground and unleashed her full power onto her. Styrak knelt before Rammas, channeling healing into her. Suddenly, he was thrown to the side, nearly hitting the wall. He saw Bestia flying through the air, but she used the Force to push away from the wall and land crouching on the floor. Vaylin fired lightning at both of them, and Styrak blocked it with a lightning bolt of his own. While two torrents of electricity collided in the middle, Bestia circled around. She heard Koth swearing from below.

"Koth?"

"We have three minutes!"

Bestia nodded, and charged at Vaylin, hitting her with Force Fear once more. This time it sent the human flinching, battering at her already weakened mental defences. Vaylin screamed, and there was a bright flash of light. Bestia found herself thrown against the wall again, her hair standing on end. She glanced about and saw Styrak getting back up. His wings unfurled from behind his back. And then she saw Vaylin stumble. Bestia suddenly felt tired and hollow. Her eyes drifted to the center of the room. Rammas stood by the monolith, one hand resting on its surface, her face blank.

"Something is draining us!" Styrak shouted. He looked frantically between Bestia and Rammas. He had to decide. In the end, he tried to make his way to Rammas, her being closer, and a hunch telling him she might have something to do with the Force being sucked out of them. Before he could reach Rammas, Vaylin appeared next to the small Sith, grabbed her and held a lightsaber to her throat. The action dragged Rammas away from the monolith, and the moment her hand left its surface, the weight lifted, and Rammas was suddenly blinking rapidly.

"One move." Vaylin hissed. "From either of you. And she's dead."

She sidestepped both Dread Masters, now utterly powerless to stop her, and dragged Rammas away into the tunnels.

"I'll be fine!" Rammas yelled.

"We have to stop the bomb first." Bestia said. "Koth?"

"It's shielded. There's three relays in the tunnels around the room, disable them and I'll be able to turn it off."

"Got it. Styrak, you go left, I go right."

Styrak nodded, and the two split up. He had to squeeze through the narrow tunnels, which added to the rage-fueled lightning storm that he unleashed onto the relay. A more rational part of his mind told him to trust Rammas and that she was a Sith and would find a way out. However, it still failed to stop the panic churning in his chest. Rammas was his replacement as a Dread Master. If something happened to her, he wasn't sure that the Dread Masters would survive the shock it would send across their Force union. But also, maybe he'd have his power back? No, this was definitely not the appropriate thing to consider, something piped up within him. Could it be that he was growing a conscience? Could it be that he also got genuinely attached to someone who wasn't Bestia, Calphayus, Mu'hass, or one of his Kell Dragons?

Styrak put away the moral dilemma for a moment as he squeezed through another tunnel. He saw Bestia standing over the smoking remains of the relay.

"Is that the last one?"

"Yeah. Let's go back to Koth and see if we're going to die."

"A second time for me." Styrak quipped grimly.

They found Koth sitting on the edge of the catwalk in the central room. He wiped sweat off his forehead when the two Dread Masters entered. He looked relieved.

"Bomb over!" He called out cheerfully.

Vaylin dragged Rammas along corridor after corridor. She was much taller than the Sith, and Rammas found herself struggling to walk. She was also being choked, and felt dizzy. The

corridors faded away before her eyes, brightening into a dull fuzzy gray that made her think of death and disease and rot. She saw a gray room with a small bed and a force field wall. She blinked and saw a human with shiny black hair, beard, and dressed in elaborate white robes, looking down at her as she hid behind someone's legs. His eyes were pitch black. His face was vaguely familiar. She blinked again, and now she stood before a hexagonal energy cage. A small human girl sat curled up on the bed inside. Her hair was long and golden. Rammas put a hand to the energy field and the hand was tiny. She blinked, and was back inside the Gravestone. Vaylin was shaking her like a ragdoll.

"Hey. Don't die on me. You're my meat shield."

"Shut...up..." Rammas mumbled.

"Oh. Good. You're alive."

Rammas bit back whatever witty response was slowly cooking in her fried brain. She found her lightsaber gone, now hanging off Vaylin's belt. She had to think, and fast, and this was exactly what her head refused to do. Those visions weren't exactly new, but this was the first time Rammas got more than a vague hunch. She wondered if Vaylin had something to do with the years missing from her childhood. Unable to think clearly, Rammas decided to play along for now. She'd find a way to escape when her head is clearer. And maybe she'd find some answers along the way.

"We have to find Rammas." Styraak was limping to and from, his cane making a clacking noise every step.

"I know, but if Vaylin is with her we can't really do much."

Bestia sat in one of the chairs. She, Koth, Styraak, and a bunch of reinforcements from the fleet reconvened at the bridge. The other three Dread Masters were here as well. Calphayus was trying to offer Styraak a cup of tea which he eventually accepted, plopping down in one of the seats.

"We will find her." Calphayus reassured. "And she's a capable young woman, she can take care of herself."

"I know. But she is also part of the union, and if that gets damaged again, I am not sure how the Dread Masters as a whole will handle it."

"That is a legitimate concern." Brontes turned from the console that she stood by together with Koth and Tyrans. "Have you found a way to unbind the union?"

"Not yet, which is why I'm worried."

"I think you're mostly worried because you see Rammas as your child." Calphayus said, and took a sip of his tea.

"No, I don't." Styrak huffed, and crossed his arms. "This is bloody preposterous."

"Yeah, keep telling yourself that." Bestia chuckled, despite the grim situation.

Styrak opened his mouth to protest, huffed again, then closed his mouth and took a big gulp of the tea Calphayus had given him. Exhaustion crept up his bones. Both the physical kind from having been drained, and the social exhaustion of having to be around so many strangers.

"I'll go find somewhere to be alone." He said, slowly getting up.

"We'll be here." Bestia replied.

Styrak limped away, teacup in hand. Bestia sunk into her chair. She watched Koth explain how the Gravestone worked to Tyrans and Brontes, who nodded and asked questions.

"Man I'm fucking beat."

"Language!" Calphayus protested feebly.

"Yeah, sorry. Point is, something weird happened. You know this creepy monolith room here on the ship? Well, in the middle of the fight against Vaylin, it started draining us of our energy and Force power, and Rammas stood next to it like she was asleep."

"That is odd, indeed."

Suddenly, she heard Lana calling her over. She shambled towards the main console. Theron was on holo.

"The Eternal Fleet jumped into hyperspace." Theron said. "It's just us left here now. We've got some reinforcements in the docking bay."

"Secure the ship and tell us if you find Vaylin or Scorpio. Vaylin has a hostage with her." Bestia said.

She moved back to her chair and closed her eyes, fully intending to take a nap. She heard Koth cheering, and Lana scolding him for the whole bomb situation. Rest would elude her, because suddenly the room fell dead silent. A familiar metallic voice rang out from the communication system.

"This vessel is under my control. Organic beings have a few minutes to abandon ship, after which your lives will be forfeit."

"What do you want with the ship?" Brontes asked.

"The Gravestone is the key to everything. It, the Geminis, and the eternal fleet are all connected. I must find out how."

The ship jumped into hyperspace with no command from Koth or anyone else.

"Where are you taking us?"

"The Gravestone is going home."

Just as Scorpio said that, the ship fell out of hyperspace, surrounded by a swarm of Eternal Fleet vessels, all bound for the same destination. Everyone gaped at the sight before them: a huge grey planet with a white glowing ring wrapped around it. The Gravestone approached the planet, and up close, it was fully made of metal. The glowing ring turned out to be an enormous

brightly lit gap that led inside. The white glow brightened until Bestia couldn't see anymore. And then, she blacked out.

Stranded

Chapter Summary

Another long one, this chapter covers the two kotet chapters that take place on lokath. Bestia has had enough of these motherfucking droids on this motherfucking planet.

Chapter Notes

Music for Bestia and StyraK exploring the city: Austin, Atlantis - Homestuck OST

Bestia stared into a bright blank sky framed by buildings so overgrown they were completely green. The sky was far too bright, and it hurt her eyes to look for too long. She sat up and looked around instead, her eyes taking a while to get used to the shade. She was on a balcony, a wall and a passage leading inside a building on one side, and a view of a city on the other. Moss and vines covered everything. She heard a noise and turned her head to see her husband stirring a few feet away. Her shoulder stung.

A humming noise drew Bestia's attention, and she stood up and turned around, grasping for her lightsaber. A black vaguely rhombic shape floated before her. A single glowing circle was etched into the middle of the shape, with lines of circuitry going up and down from it. It made a beeping sound at Bestia.

"Um...hello." Bestia said, unsure if the thing could understand her.

So far, it hasn't shown any hostility, so Bestia slowly let go of her lightsabers. The droid beeped again, and its eye changed colors from red to green. A green stripe moved up and down Bestia's body, and the droid chirped, and spat out a small flat patch. Bestia caught and

examined it. The droid bounced, and a green dot appeared pointing at a cut on Bestia's shoulder.

"Oh!" She said, "For my shoulder?"

The droid bounced again. Bestia smiled at it, and applied the patch to her shoulder. The cut stopped hurting right away.

"Thank you."

Styrak slowly rose to his feet in Bestia's peripheral vision. He immediately fixed the droid with a wary look.

"I made a friend!" Bestia grinned. "It gave me a kolto patch."

Styrak's shoulders relaxed a bit.

"Your tendency to try and bond with every beast and droid you meet is quite charming." He said, giving her a crooked but genuine smile.

The droid floated over to Styrak, and repeated the scan process. At the end, it made a noise that sounded a lot like "all good!". It backed off when shadow wings unfurled from behind Styrak's back.

"I'll fly up and scout the area."

"Look for the others!"

"Will do."

With a few powerful beats of his wings, Styrak was high up in the air. A decaying city sprawled out below. It appeared abandoned, and nature had reclaimed it almost completely. Beyond,

Styrak saw a transparent shimmering white barrier. And beyond that, immense buildings and spires that disappeared into the distance. Among them were huge domes that seemed to hold entire forests inside. He looked down, and saw movement among the ruins: small shapes were walking around and methodically burning away the vegetation.

A blaster bolt flew past him, and he spun around. Several small droids floated before him. They were different from the one Bestia befriended, more box-like in shape with chains hanging from the underside.

"TRESPASSER!" one of them screeched.

Styrak sneered, raised a hand, and blasted all three of them with lightning. They fell to the surface below, and Styrak dove back down to the balcony.

"We are inside an energy dome, not far from the edge."

"Where there's an edge there's probably an exit of some kind."

"I agree. Also, this place is crawling with droids."

The two Dread Masters left the balcony through the tunnel in the wall. They didn't have to go far before meeting a group of droids armed with flamethrowers. Bestia rolled her eyes. Why did it always have to be droids these days? Couldn't she have something organic and capable of fear to scare off? You know, as a treat?

Styrak fell behind, trying to rein in the fear that rose inside him. Bestia, however, charged forward before the droids had time to react. She decapitated one, and used the Force to direct another's flamethrower towards its friends. A third aimed at her, but a bolt of lightning sent it crumpling onto the ground. Bestia looked over, and saw Styrak standing there, with a hand extended towards the droids. He looked somewhat gray, but had a determined snarl on his face. Bestia could sense his fear. Styrak's Force storm dealt with the remaining droids as Bestia jumped out of the way.

Styrak let out a sigh of relief when the last droid fell. On an objective level, he knew his pyrophobia was the result of the trauma sustained when he died on Darvannis. He knew he had to be patient with himself, and work slowly towards overcoming that fear. Still, it made him feel weak. He remembered freezing up when Oricon went up in flames, and Rammas dragging him

along towards a shuttle. He was grateful, but it also felt like a disgrace. Bestia seemed to sense his doubts.

"You feel weak for being afraid?"

Styrak nodded.

"I said it many times before, and I'll say it again: you're not weak. You're not a disgrace. You're doing your best, and I'm proud of you."

She carefully wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"Fear is normal. Being afraid of something that has hurt you this much is normal."

Styrak hummed in agreement. This conversation had happened many times before, and it always made him feel better. He nuzzled Bestia's head gently to show his appreciation.

The two walked on. The tunnel led out onto an empty street. Buildings crowded the sides, so covered with vines and other plants that Bestia couldn't tell if they once were offices or apartment buildings or something else entirely. She noticed a lumpy shape ahead, and walked over to it. She pulled the plants away until a still intact plexiglass pane was revealed, and Bestia recognised the lump as an abandoned hovercar.

"I wonder what happened here." She murmured. Styrak shrugged to her side.

"Either war or disease. You know, the usual."

"Yeah. The usual."

The street was wide, and led up to a wall. Bestia followed it upward with her eyes until she couldn't crane her neck up anymore. High up, the wall gave way to a force field. This must have been the border Styrak had mentioned. More droids patrolled the road, and stood around an open gate at its end. The two Sith made quick work of them.

As soon as Bestia and Styrak passed the gate, the plants stopped abruptly, giving way to clean hexagonal tiles. They emerged onto a walkway leading up to a platform with an odd monument on it, shaped somewhat like the friendly droid from before, and a computer console. Bestia

approached it cautiously. It must've had some sort of motion sensor, because a hologram came to life. A bald dark-skinned human looked impassively down at the two Dread Masters. He stuttered out an error-riddled greeting.

"What is this place?" Bestia asked.

"This is Selruvian biome, sector eight thousand twenty two of the engineered world designated lokath."

"That's nice." Bestia said. She had no idea what the hologram just said, other than the planet's name. "How do I leave?"

She heard footsteps on metal, and turned around to see Torian, the young Mandalorian. Styrak bristled a little at the human approaching them.

"Oh hey, Commander."

Bestia nodded.

"You seem very unphased by the situation." She commented.

"I've seen my share of weird things." Torian shrugged.

Bestia turned to ask the hologram for more information, but it was gone. The din of blasterfire and lightsabers hitting metal drew Bestia's attention. She crept towards the edge of the platform. A group of large tripod gold and silver droids were attacking humans in golden armour. She recognised the armor: knights of Zakuul. The two groups were too busy fighting, and Bestia motioned Torian and Styrak to quietly move past. As they did so, they watched the Knights and the droids slowly destroy each other, until there was no one left: the last Knight took off the last droid's head in their final moments.

"I wonder why we've been dumped here? Some kind of battle royale thing?" Torian mused.

"Could be. These guys clearly weren't winning."

Bestia's communicator beeped. She grabbed it hastily, afraid the sound would draw unwanted attention. It was Theron.

"Are you having the same creepy day as I am?"

"Probably. We found Torian. There were Knights of Zakuul and some pissed off droids but they killed each other. Where are you?"

"I found some sort of temple or museum." He was unsure. "Not as exciting, but safe enough. I'll send you the coordinates."

"If you can reach the others, gather them there as well."

"Will do. Keep an eye out for Vaylin. She was on the Gravestone with us."

Bestia nodded, and pulled up a map. It took a while for it to load due to the unfamiliar environment and nonexistent Holonet connection. Most of it was empty, but the coordinates Theron sent weren't that far away.

"Let's get going before more of those droids get on our case."

Rammas awoke in a featureless metal room. Vaylin was already up, pacing back and forth like a caged animal, and tearing at the wall panels with the Force. Judging by the state of the walls, she's been at it for a while. Rammas watched her silently until she felt the Pureblood's gaze and wheeled around.

"The fuck are you staring at, you bug eyed little freak?!"

Rammas rolled her eyes. Here we go again, with the insults. If she had a credit for every time someone made fun of her appearance, she'd be wealthier than the Hutts. People, especially humans and fellow Purebloods, usually went for her eyes, or her odd limbs and gait. She was

used to it, and had learned to not let her annoyance show. It was a skill she picked up back on Korriban. The kids who insulted her all mysteriously went missing soon after.

"That's about the least creative insult I heard."

"Shut up and help me get those tiles off. I'm getting out of here, and I guess I'm getting you out because clearly your Alliance isn't coming for you."

"Nope."

"What?!"

"Should have asked nicely without insulting me."

"I could kill you right now."

"Same mere. If I wanted, you'd be dead where you stand."

"Yeah?"

"Do you want to die of a heart attack while curled up in a pile of your own shit, while witnessing the worst moments of your life on repeat and magnified?"

"If you're referring to what the Outlander did to me, I'm not impressed." Despite Vaylin trying to sound tough, Rammas saw her shiver. She returned to savaging the walls. For a moment, Rammas considered simply strangling her.

"They trust me enough to let me fend for myself. I'm not a child, even if people keep thinking I'm much younger than I look. For now, you're my ticket out of here so yes, I might help with the walls." Rammas threw her hands up in the air.

"And you're my meat shield. Or at least a meat shield for my shins." Vaylin snapped.

"Short jokes? Really?"

Vaylin groaned, but decided to turn her rage towards the walls. She screamed, and her hands contorted into claws. More tiles began tearing off of them, crumpled into a massive floating ball. Rammas kept sitting a few feet away, doing absolutely nothing. She wasn't that good with telekinesis anyway, and was content with Vaylin doing all the work.

Suddenly, there was a flash of blue light to the side. A man appeared by the far wall, another human, pale and gray-eyed. His head was shaved almost bald, and he wore a black tunic, pants, and boots. His face was somewhat familiar, but Rammas couldn't place it. She reached

out with the Force, but couldn't sense anything. The man ignored her, and stepped towards Vaylin, who turned around and stood there, eyes wide.

The map failed to account for the planetary defences. Laser beams danced across the plaza. Bestia, Torian, and Styrak emerged onto, almost singing the latter's robe. Bestia grumbled, and followed the nearest pair of laser beams with her eyes to the source. She then threw her lightsaber at it. Torian and Styrak caught on quickly, and started taking out the emitters, allowing the group safe passage.

This was just the first of their adventures. Beyond the plaza was a bridge, and a group of Zakuul Knights was trapped there. A fight broke out: Torian shot at the knights, Styrak brought down a small-scale Force-storm, and Bestia jumped into the fray and hacked and slashed at her enemies. In the end, Torian and the Dread Masters stood victorious.

There were more laser traps ahead, but the three dealt with them quickly. Eventually they made it to the coordinates. A large structure towered in front of them, the main doors shut.

"This should be the place." Bestia muttered.

"Over here!" A whisper came from behind a pillar. A familiar pointy-haired head peaked out. Bestia and the group jogged over, and found Theron crouching by a side entrance.

"Can't really risk being seen." He said as he led them inside. "The others are here, including your Dread Master friends. Calphayus didn't want to leave the greenhouse I found him in."

"Sounds like him." Bestia chuckled. "Is everyone okay?"

"Shaken up, but alright."

"Have you found Rammas by any chance? Vaylin had her hostage, but maybe they got separated by whatever sent us here?"

Theron shook his head.

"Afraid not. Haven't found the Gravestone either, yet."

Bestia sighed. Torian stayed behind to keep watch at the entrance, and Bestia and Styrak emerged into the main room. It was hexagonal, as everything seemed to be on this planet. A bigger version of the tech spire from before sat on a raised platform in the middle. Bestia saw Brontes and a short Twi'lek woman huddled together at the console.

"Vette and Brontes seem to be onto something helpful here."

Bestia let out a relieved sigh upon seeing that Tyrans and Calphayus were here as well. Tyrans paced around, while Calphayus sat leaning against a wall, looking dejected. Tyrans waved at Bestia. She nodded at him.

"Have you found the Gravestone?"

Theron shook his head.

"I scanned for it, and Brontes did as well. So far, nothing."

"Scorpio said that this planet is home to the Gravestone. I wonder if we can just find a replacement."

"The planet is vast. Even my scans can only get so far." Brontes said. "I do believe one of those technological monuments may prove helpful."

"Yeah!" Despite everything, Vette sounded excited. "Come here and hear what this thing has to say!"

Bestia clambered up to where the unlikely duo stood. Vette was hunched over the console. Brontes had one of her tentacles plugged into a port. A holo appeared of the entity from before. This time, however, his speech contained no glitches and errors. His name was Aries. Upon some prompting from Vette, Aries told them of the weapons program that Lokath ran on surrounding worlds. Lokath would send out various highly advanced weapons, and see how the local populations fared. Among those weapons were the Eternal Fleet, the Gravestone, Scorpio, and the Gemini droids.

"Are YOU a weapon?" Brontes asked.

"I am simply here to gather and spread information, thank you for asking." Aries said politely, before suddenly glitching out. Vette raised her hands in the air.

"Don't look at me, I didn't touch anything."

"I believe it wasn't my doing either." Brontes withdrew the tentacle from the port, just in case.

"Are you free?" The voice made Bestia sneer and Brontes frown. "Are you free?"

"Thexan? But... you're dead. Arcann killed you years ago!"

Ah, so this was Vaylin's brother, and Arcann's twin. Rammas had overheard his name mentioned by Cael and Senya before. It also explained why his face was familiar. Something was still off about this Force Ghost. Rammas couldn't sense him. Yet, she decided to stay silent and simply watch.

"I'm here now." The man's voice lacked discernible emotion, but Vaylin didn't seem to catch onto it yet. "You are so powerful. The things you can do..."

"You used to visit my cage. You brought gifts every time."

Something stirred inside Rammas's memory, in the section that was barred to her for some reason. She remembered the flashback she had, of a room with energy walls. Another memory fragment came up, of her holding a small whittled tooka cat in her much smaller hands.

Thexan didn't reply. In fact, he didn't react at all. Odd, Rammas thought. Force Ghosts generally remembered events of their lifetime. Force Ghosts could express emotions too. Vaylin slowly reached out towards him.

"Why can't I feel you?"

"Because he's a fake." Rammas said. "I'm sorry, but this isn't your brother."

Bestia bristled and snarled at the droid, but Brontes raised a hand.

"My colleague here is understandably angry with you. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"TURN ON YOUR LOCATION, I JUST WANT TO TALK." Bestia cut in.

"I would, despite the threats. But I am afraid I do not know it. I am as much a prisoner as you are. What I do know is that we are test subjects, and if we do not work together, we will die here."

Bestia huffed.

"I'd rather destroy the whole planet."

Brontes let out a tired sigh.

"I believe we may be under greater threat than Scorpio, and working with her is more beneficial to our situation than working against her."

Scorpio nodded. "I am glad to learn that the Dread Masters aren't all emotionally driven brutes."

"I will take that as a compliment." Brontes said, while Bestia started seething again.

Scorpio disappeared, and at the same time something exploded outside. Theron came running up the stairs towards the platform.

"Please tell me I can go destroy something, because I am PISSED." Bestia growled.

A blaster bolt zapped past her shoulder and hit the wall behind her. Bestia's eyes darted around, locating the source within moments. She roared, and charged towards the droids pouring into the chamber.

"There goes Bestia..." Brontes sighed.

Styrak flew up to the platform, and together, he and Brontes rained lightning on the enemy. Vette wedged herself between the Dread Masters, using her blaster to take out what the lightning didn't reach. Calphayus suddenly appeared in the middle of a group of droids, his cyan lightsaber cleaving them in half. He faded out before the others could zero in on his location.

Theron crept along the wall towards the entrance. Droids kept coming, and Bestia now stood on a considerable pile of them. Theron aimed his blaster at the controls and fired. An emergency force field came on, cutting off the tide of droids.

"This should keep us safe for now."

"I can't stay here forever. Vaylin and Zakuul aren't gonna destroy themselves." Bestia said as she hopped down from the giant pile of scrap metal.

A loud scraping noise resonated through the room, and Bestia spun around, lightsabers ready to strike. She saw a section of the wall lift upwards, revealing a passage. Brontes floated down from the platform to examine it.

"You will not have to. Vette found us an exit." She turned to the Twi'lek. "Your proficiency with ancient and unfamiliar technologies is outstanding. Would you like a spot among my Dread Guards?"

"Uhhh..." Vette stammered, thinking. "Do I get time to think?"

"As you wish. My offer will stand as long as it needs to."

Vette side eyed Brontes, then jogged down the stairs towards Bestia.

"Let's check out the passage, shall we?"

"Yeah, let's go."

Bestia walked briskly into the newly opened tunnel. Vette scampered after her.

"I was trying to get Aries back online when the door opened. You're not gonna try to recruit me into the Dread Guard as well, are you?"

"Nope. Well, unless you wish to join."

The passage was lit by faint blue lights installed along the floor. Massive clusters of cables hung on the walls. Bestia and Vette emerged into a room with a huge shaft in the center. Unlike the passages, the lights here were green and murky. In the center of the pit sat another terminal. Vette ran to the edge of the pit and pointed towards it excitedly.

"Hey, look! Another of these techno-thingies. I could try connecting to Aries again from here."

"Let's find a way across, then."

They slowly walked around the pit, examining everything. Soon, they found a console. Vette pressed a button, but the device stayed dormant. She crouched down, examining the sides and back of the device, and found a panel lying on the floor, and a hollow space on the back.

"Looks like the power's cut. But we could find some power sources and put them in."

"What should we look for?"

"Anything that's shaped like a battery and that could be powering anything nearby."

"Would a droid work?"

"Yeah?"

Bestia jumped towards a tall droid approaching them from a side tunnel. Before it could raise its weapon, Bestia cut off its head. Vette jogged up to the droid and pried open a panel in its back.

"Here. I'll go install it and see if it's enough."

Thankfully, it was. A bright yellow force field appeared before them, leading up to the terminal. The Sith and the Twi'lek crossed it, and from the central platform, they saw that the walls of the chasm were lined with horizontal glass capsules. There were bodies inside. They were thin, almost skeletal and clearly long dead.

"There must be millions of dead here..." Vette murmured.

As they approached the Technolith, an image of Scorpio appeared.

"There are billions." She said. "You've found my creators."

Vaylin froze.

"IF you're not my brother, then WHO ARE YOU?"

She flung the balled up tiles at the image, and it flickered out of existence just as the ball was about to hit it. It hit the opposite wall instead, tearing a huge hole in it.

"Welp, guess we have a way out now." Rammas shrugged.

Vaylin grabbed her by the arm.

"Shut up and follow me."

Rammas didn't argue.

"I do not know how long my connection will last. We must speak quickly."

"So speak then."

Bestia did have a prolonged lifespan, but she did not have a whole day. And yet, she listened to Scorpio as the droid told her of the Technoliths and of her creators. The Technoliths were all connected to a database that held thousands of years worth of information. The denizens of Lokath were scientists and engineers, but they fought among each other, and it brought about their destruction, only the planet, its droids, and the various advanced weapons scattered about the Galaxy left behind. Their mechanical creations rose up against the Lokathians, slaughtering most of them. However, in one last attempt to save themselves, Lokathians locked the memory cores of many of their weapons, and sent them scattering out into the void. It didn't help them, but their creations were all over the Galaxy now, used as weapons by others.

After listening to Scorpio's story, Bestia's rage lessened enough for her to give the droid one last chance. If she blew this one, she's scrap. Hell, she even felt a bit bad for Scorpio, having been used as a weapon by Vitiate and having no way out for a long, long time.

"So, basically, you came home only to be put in a box?"

"Yes, that sums it up."

"Why, though? Who's doing this?"

Vaylin dragged the Pureblood out into the light of day. Rammas hissed, but had no choice but to follow the Empress. They walked out of the building, only to find themselves surrounded by droids.

"You're gonna have to either give me my weapon and trust that I don't bury it in your guts, or fight them yourself while I play dead." Rammas said.

Vaylin glared at her, then at the droids, then screamed and unleashed a storm of lightning at them. Rammas whistled, impressed. The storm rivaled ones she'd seen Styraak conjure up, and took out the droids easily. Rammas made a mental note to dial back on fucking with the Empress, lest she'd end up on the receiving end of a similar fate. While Vaylin dismantled a few remaining droids with her lightsaber, Rammas looked around. She saw a tall spire in the distance, crowded by familiar spaceships.

"Hey, is that your fleet over there?"

Vaylin looked up from blasting a twitching droid, then looked for a moment where Rammas was pointing. She was silent, but when she turned around, she was smiling. She dragged the now limbless droid with her, and once again grabbed Rammas by the arm.

"I hope my subjects didn't miss me too much."

She started walking, now dragging both Rammas and the still active droid with her, but stopped abruptly when the image of Thexan appeared before her.

"Ah shit here we go again..." Rammas mumbled.

"Who are you? Show yourself!" Vaylin let go of the droid and sent a bolt of lightning at the fake.

The image stared at her silently for a few moments, before flickering again, changing into another human, this one with dark skin and a device around his head. Rammas and Vaylin exchanged glances. They had no idea who that was.

"Wait, Aries was behind everything the whole time? The broken information bot?" Bestia tilted her head to the side.

"Aries has been accumulating power for thousands of years. He is stronger than everyone thinks."

"Thousands of years, huh. I wonder if he can be convinced to go against Vitiate. An army of droids would be the perfect weapon against him, since he can't drain them."

Speak of the Force Demon. The image flickered and changed to that of Aries.

"I could be convinced to go against this Vitiate, if any of you have proven to be worthy of inheriting Iokath. None of you are."

Bestia crossed her arms. "I'm okay with it. I'm not that tech-savvy anyway. What about Brontes?"

"The tentacled one deems herself a master of both flesh and metal. But even she isn't worthy."

Bestia could swear she sensed a surge of indignant anger from somewhere. It added to her own anger at being called a brute for the second time today.

"You know what, go fuck yourself." She flipped the hologram off and kicked at the terminal. "Vette, we're leaving."

Metal footsteps echoed in the tunnels around them. The bridge flickered out of existence just as the two women crossed it. They looked around frantically, until Vette spotted something on the far wall.

"Heere tunnel tunnel!" She called out as she ran towards it.

Bestia watched her go, confused. And then she noticed it: the pattern of the walls was cut off at an odd spot at that wall, and it had faint scuff marks on it. Vette once again found a switch on the underside of a decorative beam that ran along the wall, pressed it, and the wall gave way.

Bestia bolted towards it, and the two ran along the tunnel until Bestia skidded to a stop at an exit. Vette nearly ran into her. They stood in a tall chamber, and in the center stood a gigantic droid.

"Dread God damn it Vette, where the fuck are we?" Bestia hissed, afraid to wake up the metal monstrosity in front of her.

To Vette's credit, she was surprisingly calm in the face of Bestia's outburst.

"Closer to the surface, I think. And closer to the temple. We just have to sneak around..."

They slowly made their way around the droid. When they passed by a terminal, Scorpio appeared on the screen.

"I have managed to escape. But so did Vaylin."

Bestia sighed, and chose her words carefully for her question.

"Does she have anyone with her?"

"A Sith Pureblood. Very short. They are on their way to spire controls. The Eternal Fleet will be free soon."

So Rammas was still held hostage by Vaylin. What's worse, Vaylin would soon reunite with her fleet. Then, it was anyone's guess what she would do. Bomb Lokath from orbit, most likely. Bestia let out a heavy sigh, worry for the fellow Dread Master outweighing her anger at Scorpio.

"I thought about what you said earlier. Out of the two entities, you're less annoying, so I'm willing to cooperate."

The holographic man disappeared once again.

"You don't have to drag me along. I'll cooperate." Rammas said carefully.

"Good. Go ahead where I can see you."

Vaylin picked up the droid, slamming it into a nearby wall for good measure. Then she gave Rammas a Force Push. The Pureblood stumbled forward, and walked in the direction she was pushed. They soon stumbled upon a group of Zakuulans, a mix of Knights, human Eternal Fleet personnel, and a single Gemini droid. They were huddled under the platform Rammas and Vaylin stood on.

"Jump." Vaylin barked.

Rammas obeyed, softening her landing with the Force. Vaylin landed behind her, and let the dented, but still somehow functioning, droid drop after. The survivors backed away from Vaylin, and then knelt before her. The Empress looked at the meager collection of humans and droids, hands on her hips.

"Are you sad lot all that's left of my forces?"

The humans stayed silent, eyes downcast. Rammas could almost see fear coming from them. Finally, before Vaylin could get angry at the lack of response, the Gemini captain stood up.

"The organic crews of all the Eternal Fleet vessels were scattered around the area, but most were exterminated."

"Call them here. We're taking back our fleet!"

"But we'll die before we take back our ships!" One of the humans cried out.

"No one's fucking dying without my permission!" Vaylin snarled at him, and the man flinched.

"His assessment is correct. We will be destroyed, Empress." The droid's shoulders slumped as far as the servos allowed. "I... I am afraid."

Rammas couldn't help but feel somewhat bad for the humans and the droid. The Gemini really did sound afraid. It reminded her of the anxious droid that came with the ship gifted to her friend by his then master. The poor thing was constantly terrified, and it took Hu'un a long time to convince the droid that he's not going to destroy it for the tiniest mistake. The memory made

Rammas wonder if Brontes or Tyrans could sequence their long coveted dread virus from such a droid's code.

Vaylin didn't have time for such Nerfshit though. Her reaction to Gemini's admission of fear was to Force Push the droid off the platform. The Gemini flew past Rammas, and the Pureblood stepped towards the railing to see where the poor droid ended up. She was seemingly fine, sprawled on the metal floor a few levels below.

"Don't you need the droid to pilot the ships or something?"

"I have others and she'll catch up. Probably." Vaylin shrugged, and then gave her subjects a withering glare. "Anyone else want to take a flight? No? Then shut the fuck up and follow me! The controls aren't far away."

Vaylin grabbed Rammas by the scruff and pushed her forward. Rammas grumbled, but started walking at the front of the group. She did not want to take a flight. Or get blasted by lightning. Or get torn limb from limb.

Instead, she turned inward, and tried to make sense of the flashback she had back on the Gravestone. She combed through her memory regarding the dark-haired human, until it clicked. She HAD met him, quite recently in fact. Except he was much older, and his eyes were grey and sad. The man must have been Valkorion, the Emperor of Zakuul, presumed dead by almost everyone.

This raised more questions than it answered. Why was she having flashbacks about Valkorion? Was she even sure if it was her past she was seeing? The flashbacks started when she came in contact with Vaylin, so she could have been seeing into Vaylin's past. But then, if Rammas had the power to see into people's pasts, why did it only show up now? It didn't make sense. Also the point of view was wrong for it to be Vaylin's, as Rammas saw the hands of whoever it was twice now, and they were decidedly not human hands. If anything they were most likely her own.

Then there was the matter of the human girl Rammas saw. Even though she threw away the seeing into Vaylin's past theory, Vaylin was the most likely candidate. Considering that Valkorion was her father and had been present in the flashback, if only as a puppet of something else. The name "Tenebrae" came to her mind unbidden.

What did Rammas have to do with Valkorion and Tenebrae? This was stupid. She tried to focus on the part of the flashback that showed the grey hallways. Maybe she could recall some identifying marker, like a banner, sigil, or sign. It was futile, and earned her a shove from Vaylin because she slowed down too much.

The human Empress was seriously getting on Rammas's nerves. An itch to make her disappear like she'd done to the Sith Academy bullies started in the back of her head. But also if the kid she saw in the flashback was really Vaylin, she felt a tiny bit bad for her. Whatever she went through wasn't pretty.

Rammas strained to bite back any witty remarks once again, and quickened her pace.

"Good. Vaylin may prove a good distraction for Aries. We can stop him together."

"I think Brontes might want to help, if we reach her and the others."

"She will. She is quite miffed by being called unworthy of inheriting lokath."

"Oh I BET."

Bestia chuckled. Her laugh was drowned by a loud metallic sound, and Scorpio's image flickered.

"I detect a power surge at your location."

Bestia turned around, to see the gigantic droid slowly come to life, stepping away from its supports and turning to face her and Vette.

"Oh for fuck's sake!"

Vette tugged on Bestia's coat.

"Look. There's those huge conduits. They feed power to the big guy."

"Got it."

Bestia dashed forward. A huge blaster bolt singed the floor behind her. The droid had firepower, but, like most oversized things, it was insultingly slow. Bestia ducked under the huge mass of cables Vette pointed out, and brought her lightsabers around in a wide arc, cutting through the cables. The droid raised its arm again, and Bestia bolted forward, avoiding the shot once again. She did circles around the droid, cutting down the other three conduits.

Then, Bestia rushed at the droid, running between its feet and slicing at the back of its knees. The colossal machine stumbled and fell to its knees. Bestia jumped onto its back, running along the metal spine, and plunged the lightsabers into the back of its neck. Again, the creator's painfully organic and humanoid sensibilities shined through. The entity twitched and fell dormant.

At the same moment, a closed door on one of the walls was blasted open. Bestia turned and crouched, ready to mow down more droids, but instead she met eyes with Brontes and Styrak. The ends of Brontes's tentacles were smoking faintly, and Styrak's hands still sparked with electricity.

"Hey Brontes. We were just talking about you. Want to tear Aries a new one?"

"Yes I would, in fact, like to tear him a 'new one'. Or several."

"How did you find us?"

Brontes looked at the giant droid lying face down on the floor.

"I would be surprised if the commotion wasn't audible on the other side of the planet. What did we miss?"

"Aside from this?" Bestia jumped down to the floor. "Vaylin is free and wants us dead. The information bot wants us dead. Scorpio wants him dead. None of them can feel fear, so we're, once again, fucking useless."

"It has been a while since we've faced a challenge."

"True."

"I would like things to just stop happening..." Calphayus sighed from the back.

"Me too." Bestia said. "So, going underground didn't work."

"What if we go up?" Theron said. "There's a landing pad on the roof."

"Yes, but how do you expect us to get off the planet? We don't have the Gravestone. Or any other vessel for that matter."

"My shuttle's inside it. I have been scanning for the Gravestone, but not my shuttle."

"I see. Your implants have an uplink to it." Brontes appeared before Theron, ignoring any kind of personal space, much to his chagrin.

"They do. And no, you can't dissect them."

"Even if you do find your shuttle, we still have hundreds of droids to get through, and as Bestia said, our powers do not work on them. Given time, me and Tyrans could hack into them, but alas. We do not have the time."

"They're just droids." Bestia shrugged.

"There's hundreds of them!" Lana threw her hands up in the air. "We have to fight smart, not hard?"

"We could rig up some kind of distraction..." Tyrans mused.

"Like the giant droid right over there?" Vette pointed at the fallen droid.

"Good thinking." Brontes said.

She floated up, examining the droid. Tyrans and Vette joined her while Bestia sat down by a wall. Brontes's tentacles shot out from behind her back, each boasting a different tool. Under the Dread Master's control, the appendages welded and reattached severed cables, quickly repairing the damage. And Brontes didn't even have to lift a finger. Tyrans and Vette worked on the legs. Theron wandered around the room, one hand held to the implant on his temple.

"Someone completely destroyed this unit's logic circuits." Came Brontes's cold voice from the top of the droid. "And nearly severed its head." She glared at Bestia through the eyeholes of her mask. "Someone will have to pilot it."

"Don't look at me, I don't think I'll fit inside."

"I was not speaking of you."

The tentacles on her back coiled tightly against her body, and she disappeared inside some sort of a cavity. Theron and Lana exchanged glances. The giant droid slowly rose to its feet, and then jumped up. Rockets flared at its heels, and it tore through the glass domed roof, showering those below with glass. Soon after, sounds of metal being crushed and artillery fire came from the outside. Bestia grumbled from her spot by the wall.

"We could join her outside." Styarak walked up to her, wings appearing from behind him.

Bestia grinned, and let Styrak pick her up and fly up to the roof. The giant droid was in the courtyard below, surrounded by a huge pile of scrap. Its own hull looked singed and dented. Bestia sighed as she assessed the situation. She'd be more of a hindrance down there, because Brontes would have to worry about not stepping on or blasting her. Styrak, however...

He raised a hand, and lightning shot out, hitting a floating drone behind the droid's back. The droid turned around slowly, and gave Styrak a nod, and then proceeded to stomp and blast through a new wave of enemies.

Bestia sat down cross-legged a few feet away from the roof's edge, and looked down at the mayhem below. Between Brontes piloting the droid, and Styrak's lightning, they were making quick work of the enemy. However, she also noticed the damage to the droid. Pieces of its hull were starting to fall off, and sparks came from its joints.

The sound of engines distracted her from the battle, and she looked up. A small shuttle came flying from behind a nearby building, and Bestia sprung up to her feet. She waved at Styrak, motioning him to withdraw. He flew after her as she ran towards the shuttle. Behind her, the droid suddenly jumped up, and Brontes gracefully landed next to her and Styrak. The droid exploded high above. Brontes looked up, and sighed.

"Pity. It could have been useful in rebuilding Oricon. Or establishing a new base."

"Yeah. Imagine how quick we could get the debris sorted."

"I suppose I could build something similar."

They all piled into the shuttle and took off. Theron directed the vessel upwards, but had to slow down as another ship cut them off. Bestia flipped it off through the porthole.

"I don't think your road rage display works..." Brontes observed.

"The vessel is empty. Watch." Scorpio was on the communicator again.

The ship darted ahead, and then suddenly exploded, pieces falling down to the surface. Bestia groaned loudly.

"For fuck's sake, can't things be easy for once?"

"I am afraid they cannot." Scorpio said. "The planet is surrounded by a shield. Aries controls it."

"So if we want to get out we'll have to kick his shiny metal ass?"

"Yes. Your terms are crude, but efficient."

The image glitched, and they were face to face with Aries once again.

"Your struggles provide invaluable design feedback. Still, my decision remains. None of you are worthy of inheriting lokath."

"Are you certain?" Brontes's tentacles writhed behind her back. "How about we meet in person and discuss this."

"And by "discuss" she means you get turned into droid chunky Tatooine meatsauce." Tyrans added.

"Turn on your location, we just want to talk." Bestia added.

"Empty threats. Soon, you will die."

"I'm detecting a power surge building up." Theron looked at them over his shoulder.

"The weapon I used to incapacitate you is re-energizing."

"The white light?"

"That is bad news. We are out in the open this time." Brontes said. Her tentacles curled around her.

"This time, you will not wake up. Except for the aberrant one."

Bestia tilted her head to the side, confused.

"The big male."

Bestia bristled and clenched her fists.

"Did you just call my husband-"

Scorpio wrestled the control over the signal back at that moment. Despite her face being unable to form expressions, she looked smug.

"I've identified a flaw in Aries. He talks too much. Your banter revealed his coordinates."

Vaylin, Rammas, and Vaylin's subjects finally arrived at the controls. The Gemini droid caught up with them when they descended down a few levels. She was a little dented, but functional, and stayed quiet the remainder of the walk.

Vaylin quickly dispatched the droids guarding the controls with a lightning storm, and freed the fleet. The ships swarmed above, and one descended to a dock nearby. The group boarded, and Rammas was dragged to the bridge. A pair of Force suppression manacles was fastened around her wrists, and a Zakuul Knight was instructed to guard her.

"So I don't have to babysit you." Vaylin said.

She watched as one of the ships flew high above the others. It would have cleared the atmosphere if it didn't explode. Vaylin kicked the nearby chair, then hopped on one foot and swore up a storm, then turned to the Gemini captain.

"I have a friend for you. Find out where the source of the shield is from him."

Vaylin Force-pushed the droid towards Gemini. Gemini's eyes glowed, and the column of light she floated in briefly flashed red. A map of Lokath displayed on its surface, with a big red dot not far from a swarm of smaller green dots.

"Shield source located. Warning: sensors detect an energy surge building up at the location." The Gemini looked down at Vaylin. Her voice, while mechanical, betrayed fear once again. "Empress. This is the same type of surge as the one that incapacitated us before. We will not survive it this time."

Vaylin grumbled and kicked the droid at her feet. It skidded away. Its eye glowed and it spoke.

"This Gemini unit is defective. It carries the corruption of Scorpio. I can reset it to factory settings."

"I am listening."

"I only require a link."

"If it gets Gemini to shut up and obey me, do it."

Vaylin dragged the droid to a terminal. A cable extended from its ruined arm and plugged itself in. Rammas watched the column of light flash red. The Gemini within twitched and writhed. The column flashed white several times, and the droid went limp, before straightening out.

"Reset complete." Gemini announced in a placid metallic voice. "Awaiting instructions."

"Turn the fortress to dust!"

Bestia landed and ran towards the building. Styrak caught up with her, flying at her side. Brontes, Tyrans, and Calphayus brought up the rear.

"There's a massive energy surge building up right ahead. Hurry." Brontes said as she zapped past, metallic wings gleaming in the artificial daylight.

Just as they approached the entrance, a ball of light fell onto the building. Bestia looked up and saw Eternal Fleet vessels circling above. The base appeared unharmed, though.

"Vaylin." She spat, before fucking inside the building.

"We will have to be quick then. I don't think these shields will last forever." Brontes shrugged as she floated next to her.

"Pity we can't just get Vaylin and this Aries asshole to destroy each other." Tyrans said.

He pressed something on the triangular medallion at his chest. Glowing particles enveloped his arms. They solidified into golden gauntlets etched with the same dark stripes as his mask.

The Dread Masters walked into a large room with a huge window taking up the entire opposite wall. A droid stood before a control panel. It was bulky and bland looking, in stark contrast to Scorpio and Gemini's polished shells. The droid turned around, and the image of a human flashed briefly where it stood.

"You must be some kind of a virus, truly." Aries sounded exasperated.

The Dread Masters fanned out, standing in a wide half circle with Bestia in the center. Her hands rested on the handles of her lightsabers as she eyed Aries.

"You look like a pile of scrap. I expected something fancier."

"My form is purely functional. And its function is to eliminate you."

Without warning, the droid dashed towards Bestia and sliced at her with a vibroblade. She jumped back, her lightsabers coming to life. The droid has clearly been studying her fighting style, as it was relentlessly attacking her with two blades of its own. Bestia struggled against the assault. Defense had never really been her strong suit.

Styrak saw this, and blasted Aries with lightning, knocking him away. While the droid recovered, Styrak jumped on him, drawing the enemy's attention away from Bestia. At the same time, Tyrans joined the fray, delivering a powerful punch to Aries's midsection, unprotected by the chassis. Calphayus appeared behind Aries, about to stab him with his dualsaber, but the blade fizzled out upon contact with the droid's armour.

Boxed in on all sides, Aries unleashed a knock-back pulse, sending everyone except Styrak flying. Something hissed above, and the room was filled with laser beams. Brontes weaved among them, her wings changing back into tentacles and shooting at the emitters to take the lasers off. Calphayus was thrown at the large computer console, ending up in the only safe space in the room. He cloaked himself with the Force to not draw any more attention. Tyrans and Bestia zigzagged around the laser beams back towards Aries and returned to pummeling him.

While armour protected most of the droid's body from their lightsabers, he still had unprotected joints. However, those were kept safe by his fighting ability. He copied their fighting styles, alternating between Bestia's ruthless assault and Styrak's defensive style.

And then he aimed a flamethrower right at Styrak's face. Styrak blocked the flames with a Force shield, but staggered backwards. Time froze for Bestia as she watched Aries bury one of his blades in Styrak's side. Styrak let out a short scream, completely drowned out by Bestia's own roar. She charged at Aries, and tackled him into the wall, putting all her rage into it. Tyrans joined her, his gauntlets transforming into sharp claws that dug into the cables in Aries's midsection as payback, and tore a few out. Bestia grabbed one of the droid's arms and tore it off, and then hit him over the head with it.

Brontes and Calphayus were at Styrak's side in moments, dragging him behind the console. He was propped up against it. He gritted his teeth, and his hand glowed a dark purple. He held it against the bleeding wound, and growled while the healing did its job. It was a painful process, as dark side healing wasn't kind. Styrak felt the torn muscles and organs mend themselves. Calphayus and Brontes stood guard over him.

A vibration caused Brontes to look around, until she was facing the window. A machine was spinning wildly outside, arcs of lightning shooting off of it.

"That's not good." She muttered, floating over to the console.

The screen informed her that the weapon was almost ready to fire. Bestia joined her. Brontes jammed one of her tentacles into a port and started typing feverishly at the keyboard, trying to slice into the computer in time.

"Behind you!" Styrak called out weakly from his spot by the wall. He raised a hand, sparks crackling around it. Bestia turned to face Aries, his remaining arm brandishing a retractable knife. Before she could react, Aries collapsed to the floor, revealing Scorpio standing at the entrance holding a blaster rifle.

Bestia bristled at the new arrival, but Scorpio pushed past her and plugged her hand into the console. The screens turned green, and the weapon outside slowed down to a stop. Arcs of electricity still coursed along the structure, though.

"You are welcome." Scorpio said.

Brontes stared at the screens.

"The good news: the weapon is stopped. The bad news: Aries has overloaded it, so it's going to explode."

"Of course it is..." Bestia growled, giving Aries a Force-powered kick. She followed up by picking him up with telekinesis, and slamming him into the floor, walls, and ceiling several times. Happy with her handiwork, she turned to Scorpio.

"You."

"Yes. I am me, thank you for noticing."

"What are you going to do?" Brontes asked.

"I am going to upload my consciousness to the planetary network. I will become one with Iokath. I will not trouble you again. I suggest you evacuate the planet."

"And why should I let you do that? You crossed us several times. I mean, you also helped us several times..."

"I may be of assistance against Vaylin. And possibly even Vitiate."

Bestia sighed. Behind her, Tyrans and Calphayus helped Styraak limp towards the exit.

"Ah, fuck it. I'm convinced."

"I would like access to this world's technology. In the interest of science, of course." Brontes said.

"I will contact you." Scorpio replies.

A particularly large bolt of lightning hit the building. The weapon tilted a bit. Bestia ran towards the exit, Brontes flying after her. They looked over one last time, and saw Scorpio's abandoned metal body collapse to the floor.

Bestia broke into a sprint and was outside in seconds. The Gravestone floated by the edge of the platform. Calphayus and Tyrans helped Styraak hobble into the hangar. Something exploded behind Bestia, the ground shook, and she darted forward, dodging a piece of debris. She and Brontes bolted towards the ship, fire raining around them. They jumped into the hangar, the forcefield coming on behind them, and the Gravestone took off. Its shields glowed as the Eternal Fleet kept pelting the area with fire.

Bestia stood by the hangar entrance, and watched Aries's base go up in flames. A burial pyre for an arrogant metal asshole, she thought. The devastation quickly receded into the distance,

and the last thing Bestia saw before the Gravestone turned was a white-hot orb expanding from where the base stood. She backed away from the forcefield.

The explosion took several of the Eternal Fleet ships, the rest barely making it. Rammas could only sit and watch, petrified, as the white light nearly devoured Vaylin's ship. In the blinding glow, she thought she saw something. A small object leaving Lokath. She stared at it, squinting.

"They didn't even try to save you." Vaylin's voice took her out of her thoughts. Rammas shrugged, putting on an air of nonchalance.

"Yeah." She said, guarded. "If you want to gloat, just get it over with."

"Nah, I'll just show you off like a trophy during the huge party I'm going to throw when we return to Zakuul."

"As long as I don't have to dance in a metal bikini, I'm good."

Vaylin looked at Rammas for a long while, probably trying to mentally put a metal bikini on her. Then she doubled over laughing. Rammas glared back at her, unimpressed, and the Knight guarding her shuffled his feet nervously.

"Do you assholes need music for your party? Because I heard Zakuulan music, and while I don't want to shit on it, most of it is far too fucking pompous for any kinda good time."

"Oh and you're the old god of music taste."

"Yep. My music taste is divine. And I humbly request an opportunity to inflict it upon the guests of your party. If anyone shows up that is."

Vaylin considered the offer. It sure freed her from the need to find a DJ and then pay them an exorbitant amount of credits to provide music for her party. She doubted the captive could do much damage through music. She could build a decorative golden cage around the equipment, presenting Rammas as a little songbird.

"The only thing I will require is access to the Holonet so I can download the songs." And send out a message, Rammas thought.

"Fine. You can be useful at least."

"Are you alright?" Bestia sat down next to Styrak.

He nodded, although he wasn't fully sure. He was alright physically, his dark healing saw to that. But mentally he was shaken. He had no idea Aries would use his pyrophobia against him. He sighed and grumbled.

"Stabbed by a bloody droid. How far have I fallen?"

"Happens to the best of us. Remember how Arcann stabbed me?"

"Arcann was a powerful Force user trained since birth."

"And Aries has probably been around longer than Vitiate, and had access to experiment data from multiple planets."

"I feel useless." Styrak muttered, looking down.

"You're not. I mean it."

"I wonder how Aries figured out my fear."

"Probably the same way he copied my fighting style: by observing us through his droids."

Bestia looked around the bridge. Almost the whole crew was here. Koth was in the pilot's seat. Theron and Lana sat in chairs on the opposite end of the room. Brontes tapped away furiously at a datapad. Tyrans had his nose buried in his own datapad. Calphayus was napping.

"We didn't get a chance to save Rammas, either." Styrak said grimly.

"I know. But I think she'll be fine. She's Sith. We'll get her back as soon as we can."

"Vaylin will probably take her back to Zakuul." Styrak frowned.

"Don't you two have that Zildrog cult on Zakuul?"

"We do. I have forgotten. Rammas is the one who kept in contact with them. However, I'm not sure what they can do about it."

"They could be on the lookout. Or pass her a message somehow."

"I will contact them."

Bestia stretched her legs, and reclined in the chair. She wondered how long they've been gone.

"At least we got the Gravestone back."

Chapter End Notes

I wanted Rammas and Vaylin to at least start getting along but it seems like they have their own ideas.

Also, flipped bird count: 13

Party Crashers

Chapter Summary

Vaylin and her horrible no-good party that was ruined by the mean Outlander and the DJ.

Chapter Notes

I actually made a playlist of songs Rammas would have played. One day I might figure out how to make my own beats and give Bestia's Wrath the kickass witch house soundtrack it deserves.

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLrAGJx7bbGiVzxaB_mJRa2MH3uYGa0CSC

"What now?"

Bestia stood by the holotable, arms crossed. Theron and Lana stood on the opposite side, while StyraK paced around, typing at a datapad. Shyren sat in a chair by a wall.

"Bad news. The Eternal Fleet destroyed six Alliance patrols, an outpost, and a Sith Empire supply convoy in the last hour alone."

Bestia raised an eyebrow spike.

"Well they're being productive all of a sudden. What's going on?"

"Vaylin regained control of the Gemini droids. And now she's celebrating her newfound success. You might want to see this."

Theron brought up a holo, an advertisement for an event. It showed a drawn image of a Pureblood dressed in a feathery golden dress, in a golden cage. Bestia scowled in anger as she recognised the Pureblood's black eyes. The holo promised a feast, dancing, and a speech by the Empress.

"She's using Rammas as some kind of a prized animal for her little party!" Bestia growled.

"I have a contact on the inside. We can infiltrate the party, crash it, and ruin Vaylin's reputation."

"And free Rammas." StyraK finished. "I would like to go."

"I'm all for that, but how is it going to help with the Eternal Fleet?" Bestia asked.

"It won't. But it will discredit Vaylin in front of her subjects. People of Zakuul aren't happy with her rule. She's more cruel than Arcann, and people have already been sick of him. A single spark could light up a rebellion."

A flash of a memory from long ago came upon Bestia. Her standing in the rain, looking over a roiling mass of people gathering below, and beastly rage threatening to drown her. She would drown, and the rebelling slaves met an undeserved grizzly death. Vaylin didn't seem to be as

burdened by guilt and remnants of morals as Bestia was. She wouldn't hesitate to turn her Force mastery upon any dissenters.

"Would an open rebellion on Zakuul even stand a chance against Vaylin?" She finally asked. "It's built similarly to the Sith Empire. The Sith Empire has faced many rebellions, and withstood them mostly because it has many powerful Force users in charge."

"Like you." Theron glared at her. Bestia held his stare until he had to blink.

"Yes. Like us." She said, her voice sorrowful. "It's dishonourable. But I can see Vaylin simply summoning up a Force storm, or using the Horizon Guard and Eternal Fleet to destroy any dissent."

"Even an unsuccessful rebellion would slow the Eternal Empire down. We have people on Zakuul, so they're not alone."

"I suppose you have a point." Bestia said. "What's the plan?"

"My contact will provide you with disguises." Theron gave Styraak an uncertain look. "Although it might be difficult to get armor for him."

"I can go with Bestia instead." Shyren rasped. "Vaylin has pardoned the Scions. Few risked going back, but it's not unheard of. I have unfinished business on Zakuul."

"You stand out more than even Styraak does!" Theron sighed, and pinched the bridge of his nose. "You don't even look human anymore."

"I don't. But my robes and mask hide my appearance well enough."

"Fair point, I guess."

Styraak sat down and went back to typing on his datapad. He was sending messages to the Heralds of Zildrog cell he and Rammas led while they were on Zakuul. The Heralds saw the two of them as avatars of their god. And, of course, they lost their collective minds when they learned that their avatar was held hostage by the Empress. Styraak finished reading the message and leaned back in his chair.

"The Heralds of Zildrog promised they'd do everything in their power to assist in freeing her. At least the cell I and Rammas led."

Theron and Lana exchanged uncertain glances.

"Great, now there's crazed cultists involved."

"The more the merrier." Bestia said. "If anything, they will provide a good distraction, and an incident of such scale is going to thoroughly fuck Vaylin's credibility."

"While I have my own reservations about the Heralds, I agree with Bestia. They are useful in this situation."

"Maybe they and the Horizon Guard will just kill each other." Koth said, frowning. "That would solve two problems at once."

The Palace of the Eternal Dragon was stupidly, ridiculously opulent. That much was clear even from the little Rammas saw while being escorted to the suite she was to stay in. Gilded panels and columns disrupted the monotony of the polished white walls. Elaborate tapestries and expensive paintings hung between them. Rammas recognised two of the paintings: the Sith Citadel on Dromund Kaas, and the Dread Palace. She remembered the artist coming to Oricon and setting up shop on a tall rock formation, two Dread guards keeping vigil over the process. It must have either been a copy, or the original, retrieved from the rubble of the Dread Palace.

Rammas was shoved through a set of double doors. They were locked behind her. She listened to the footsteps, waiting for them to recede, but they never did. The Knight must be standing guard at the door. She then turned to examine the space she was in: a large antechamber, with another set of double doors before her, an archway to her left, and a smaller door to her right. The room was exquisitely furnished, in the same gold, white, and dark grey color scheme as the hallway. Rammas tugged at the door handle just in case, and it only confirmed what she already knew: it was locked.

She huffed to herself, and decided to explore the rest of the apartment. The archway led to a kitchen, which Rammas noted was stocked with food and cutlery, including knives. She considered taking one to use as a weapon, but then decided against it. It wouldn't be much use against a building full of Force users. Still, she kept the knives in the back of her head, just in case.

The big doors led to a bedroom with a large window looking at the city. It was, of course, locked. At least Vaylin's goons were smart enough to do that, even if they left a kitchen full of sharp knives behind. Rammas sighed and checked out the last door. It led to a large bathroom. Nothing really useful here.

The Pureblood wandered back into the kitchen and examined her meal options. In the end she ended up fixing herself a sandwich with some cold cuts. She then sat on the huge bed and

fished out her holocom. Somehow it found a Holonet connection, but it was limited to Zakuul. A notification blinked on the screen: a message from one of the Heralds of Zildrog.

The Sith took a bite out of her meal, and pulled up the keyboard interface. She made some small talk with the Herald, mostly to disguise the actual conversation. The Heralds have been contacted by Styrak. Bestia was going to infiltrate and crash the party Vaylin was throwing, and the Heralds planned to join them.

A plan formed in Rammas's head. She sent off a series of messages. She would play a specific song to act as the signal for both Bestia and the Heralds to act. Now she just had to pick a suitably epic song for her eventual exit. She asked the Herald to tell Styrak that she's alright and that she doesn't have a Holonet connection to the greater galaxy.

A skinny blond man dressed in a skimpy black and gold tunic hovered above the holotable. He looked sheepishly at the gathered Alliance Command.

"I apologize on behalf of my people. For what the Fleet did."

"Who are you?" Bestia asked.

"Indo Zal. Magistrate of Revelry, and attendant to Empress Vaylin."

"Must be one scary job. You are brave to contact us."

"Ah, thank you, Outlander. People of Zakuul are sick of Vaylin. Maybe if we work together, we can remove her."

"She took someone from us."

"Ah the little alien?"

"Yes. Her name is Rammas, and I would like to free her when we're on the inside. Also, knowing her, she is likely planning something as well."

"She volunteered to provide music for the event. She's held in a guest suite in the palace."

"Assist her in whatever she's planning." Bestia said.

"Ah, I'll see what I can do. As for getting you in, I'll secure invitations and disguises. How many are you bringing?"

"Myself, and Shyren here. Styrak wants to come as well. So, three."

Indo threw a doubtful look in Styrak's direction, sizing him up. He frowned.

"I'm afraid I might not be able to secure a disguise for someone so tall. I see your Scion friend already has proper robes, though."

"Yeah, I'll just wear some cleaner ones. And a mask." Shyren said.

Indo nodded, then looked over his shoulder.

"I have to go."

The call ended. Styrak slumped in the chair, staring at his datapad. He then smiled.

"The Heralds have forwarded a message from Rammas. She is okay, but can't contact us directly because, and I quote: 'palace Holonet sucks ass'."

Bestia chuckled. This was the first bit of goot news. Rammas was okay and planning something. If everything went at least somewhat according to plan, Vaylin would have a major scandal on her hands.

The door to the suite opened, and Rammas quickly shoved the holocom out of sight. She shook her head. These people didn't even bother knocking. She stood up from the bed and found herself face to face with Vaylin. Or more accurately, face to shoulder level. The Empress had two more humans with her: a skittish short man with a pompadour dressed in a skimpy tunic, and a woman in an immaculately tailored suit. Both radiated fear. The woman pulled out a measuring tape.

"Please take off your clothes." Her voice was fearful and shaky.

"This better not be for a metal bikini..." Rammas grumbled. "Am I going to get any privacy, *Your Majesty*?"

The answer was no. Vaylin stared the whole time. The skittish man had the decency to turn away. Rammas sighed, and shrugged out of her orange dread guard cloak, the black shirt that said GIT GUD on the front, and pants. If the tailor did notice a similarity between the tattoos on Rammas's back and the ones on Vaylin's arms, she said nothing. Vaylin didn't comment on them either. The tailor took the measurements as quickly as she could without sacrificing accuracy. Both she and Rammas wanted this ordeal to be done and over with.

"Don't worry, little songbird. You will be pretty for my party."

Rammas glared at Vaylin, quickly putting her pants, shirt, and coat back on. The title was grating to her, but she kind of walked into it by volunteering as a DJ, didn't she?

"I'll need some special equipment." She finally said, keeping her voice even.

"Indo, see to it. I have executions to plan. The party will be to die for!"

Vaylin and the tailor left the room, leaving Rammas with the short man. He looked over his shoulder, fear rolling off him in waves. After a minute or so, he turned to Rammas.

"Nice hair." She said, hoping to offer some friendly banter. "I'm Rammas."

"Thank you." Indo looked around again, then leaned in slightly. "I was told you are planning something special for the party."

The wording struck Rammas as odd. Did Indo know something? She decided to act casual.

"Yeah, I just need to see what kind of equipment I'll be working with. And I will likely need a specific kind of speakers for better bass. Oh and access to the greater Holonet, to download the songs I want to play."

"Those can definitely be arranged!" Indo clapped his hands nervously. "Follow me and stay close, please."

"What was that about executions?" Rammas asked as she followed Indo along the gilded corridors.

"The Empress's idea of entertainment is, ah, unorthodox. She wants to execute a number of captured rebels during the party."

"I see."

Rammas fell silent. She wondered if she was going to be executed as well. She wouldn't put it past Vaylin to do something like this. She'd have to forward that information to Bestia later, and find a way to survive. One thing at a time.

She was escorted to a room with a computer in it. Indo stood nearby while Rammas sat down in the chair. He seemed distracted, not paying attention to what Rammas was doing. She reached for her wrist, and unlatched a golden bracelet she wore. She then straightened it out and plugged one end into a port. The data spike contained access codes and coordinates for the internal network used by the Dread Masters and the Dread guard. She glanced over her shoulder and saw Indo staring pointedly at his datapad. She put in her access codes, and began downloading the files to the data spike.

"Oh shit." Tyrans said, staring at his datapad. "She's really feelin it."

"Hm?" Bestia walked over and looked at the screen. The strings of status updates displayed may as well have been a foreign language to her.

"That's the most passive aggressive playlist I've ever seen." Tyrans grinned, displaying sharpened teeth.

"I mean if I were kidnapped and then told to provide music for some pretentious wankers I'd make an angry playlist too." Bestia said.

"That's not all. Most of the songs she grabbed are the versions I modified to have infrasound bass. She's planning something. At the very least, she plans to scare people."

Styrak cleared his throat, drawing Bestia's attention.

"I received a message just now. Vaylin plans to execute a group of Zakuulan rebels during the event. The Heralds plan to hide outside of the palace. Rammas will play a specific song, called "Awaken", as a signal for the Heralds to move in."

"Then we could move in as well. Use the chaos to our advantage." Bestia mused before turning to Tyrans. "What does the song sound like?"

The dress was beautiful and fit her perfectly, Rammas couldn't deny that. In a different situation she might have enjoyed it. Golden feathers covered the chest and sides, forming a skirt that was knee length in the front, but had a trail of longer feathers in the back. All the more to fit into the "little songbird" theme Vaylin was so obsessed with.

The Empress kept staring at her like she was a roast Alderaanian Quail, her hands crooked into claws. Her nails were cut haphazardly, Rammas noted, shuddering internally in disgust. Jagged, uneven nails were something that has always bothered her. She wondered if she was going to be executed, roasted, and eaten by the Empress. That would be a disgraceful way to go.

Finally, Vaylin and the tailor left. The dress was left behind for the next day, and Rammas was left alone. She waited for a while after the Empress left, before slipping out of the room. With the shackles cutting her off from the Force, the Knights allowed her to roam the palace. It's not like she could do anything against the Empress and all the Horizon Guards and Knights that guarded the building. So she wandered, mostly ignored. Staff and Knights scurried about in preparation for the party. Even with her connection to the Force dampened, Rammas could sense their fear.

She was walking along a corridor when she heard the voices coming from one of the empty guest rooms. She crouched, and peeked inside. A holocom sat on a table, and Vaylin paced around like a caged animal, her back to Rammas.

"We have had a breakthrough." Said a cold, mechanical male voice. It tugged at something within Rammas's mind.

"Yeah yeah, the last idiot said the same. I had so much gore stuck in my hair that I had to shave it all off."

"I am confident in the results. You will be free of your limitations soon."

"That would be nice. Prepare for my arrival at Nathema. I plan to depart as soon as possible."

Rammas backed away from the door slowly. Why was the name "Nathema" so familiar? The Sith made her way to the end of the corridor and then speedwalked back to her room.

"Got another message. Rammas is asking what Nathema is."

Bestia froze. The scars on her back tingled uncomfortably at that name.

"Why would she hear that name on Zakuul?"

Then she remembered Valkorion, sitting in a cell opposite of hers. His wrists and ankles were raw and bleeding from the shackles and restraints. He wasn't as resilient as Bestia was, and Vitiate eventually broke him. He didn't have Styraak and the other Dread Masters who stormed in and demanded Bestia's release. Unlike Bestia, he was alone.

"She overheard Vaylin mentioning it." Styraak said. "Are you alright?"

Bestia stayed silent for a while. Then slowly nodded.

"Didn't think I'd hear of that place again. What would Vaylin want with it?"

"Ask Cael."

That definitely was an idea. Bestia needed to retrieve Shyren for a briefing anyway, and the disguised Emperor was usually with them and Heskai.

"I'll go do that."

Rammas sat on the bed, the dress leaving her feeling cold and vulnerable. She took the triangular badge from her shirt, and attached it to the golden collar of the dress. Her dataspike hugged her wrist, back in its bracelet form.

The door flew open, and Vaylin marched in, grabbing Rammas by the arm. Her nails poked at the Sith's skin painfully. Wait, weren't they blunt just yesterday? Whatever. She'd think about it later. Rammas let the human drag her along, not wanting the suddenly sharp talons to give her tetanus, rabies, and possibly another dose of rakghoul plague if she walked too slow.

Vaylin shoved Rammas forward, and she nearly bumped into a tall Horizon Guard. Suddenly a cold metal collar was slapped onto the back of her neck.

"What the fuck?!" She demanded.

"Another safety measure." The Guard said. "Orders of the Empress."

The Guard escorted her to her perch for the night. A massive golden cage housed state-of-the-art DJ equipment. Complete with ostentatious gold-plated headphones. Rammas was ushered into the cage, the door closed behind her. She put her hands on her hips, looking around. At least Indo came through with the equipment, she noted. The speakers were exactly to her specifications, capable of producing sounds below human hearing range. Those sounds would put everyone on edge. Giving those pretentious humans a scare was the least Rammas could do. She stepped up to the equipment and plugged in her dataspikes, transferring the songs to its internal storage. The event was about to start.

Cael wasn't much help. He froze up when Bestia asked him about Nathema. Remembering her own time on the planet, Bestia didn't want to prod him too much. What she managed to get was that Vaylin was so strong in the Force, Vitiate feared her. As a result, Vitiate locked her power away on Nathema. Cael didn't say more, and Bestia retrieved Shyren and headed out.

Later, Bestia and Shyren peered out of the shuttle portholes as it rumbled towards the Palace of the Eternal Dragon. Of course it was Eternal, and of course it was stupidly golden, Bestia thought. Zakuulans sure loved putting gold paint on everything. Bestia couldn't blame them, gold was a pretty color. However, sometimes too much is too much.

Bestia could barely see anything out of the Zakuul Knight helmet. At least it was big enough to hide her hair. The rest of the armor felt alien and restrictive. Especially the tight pants and sleeves. Oh by the bloody Force, the sleeves! She had only been wearing the disguise for a few minutes and already had the urge to either push the sleeves up or tear them off completely.

Shyren, on the other hand, seemed relatively calm and comfortable. They've switched their worn out robes for a clean more intact set and made sure they covered their entire body. The long skirt took care of the beastly legs and small tail they've started growing, and a Scion mask hid their warped face.

"We're approved for landing!" Theron called out from the pilot's cabin. "Indo really pulled through with this rig, and your disguise."

Theron looked Bestia over. Then he gave Shyren a long doubtful look. Shyren stood up and straightened their back and put their clawed hands in their pockets. Theron sighed.

"I still think Shyren stands out."

"I plan to stick to the shadows." Shyren said.

"If you say so. Indo will meet you inside."

Shyren and Bestia nodded.

"You go first. I follow. That's kinda the tradition for Knight and Scion pairs. Keep your back straight and walk with purpose." Shyren said.

Bestia hopped out of the shuttle, Shyren following. Walking like she owned the place was easy for Bestia. She glanced up at the palace, taking in the ridiculous amount of gold plating and geometric patterns. A Holonet camera floated by, and Bestia had to push down the urge to flip it off.

"She's streaming this shit..." Shyren rasped.

The two made their way towards the huge entrance. Indo stood by, greeting the guests and instructing a few Knights that came by. They dispersed as Bestia approached.

"Ah, my favourite Knight and Scion duo!" Indo clasped his hands together, before handing them small bags.

"Party favors?" Bestia asked. Shyren rustled through their bag.

"Ion charges. Three in each. And a map. Place them on security relays marked, and trigger them during Vaylin's speech."

"Understood. We'll patrol the first floor then." Bestia said.

"Stay away from the Horizon Guards. They can sense your presence."

Bestia gave Indo a court nod. Shyren fished out a piece of candy and shoved it under their mask.

"Oh, this is good." They mumbled.

Bestia and Shyren walked through the doors. She found herself in a huge space, with a balcony overlooking it. Lavishly dressed guests mingled with worn out waiting staff, and Bestia noticed the collars on their necks. They must be the rebels Indo mentioned. Bestia scanned the crowd, hoping to not see any familiar faces. She saw the horizon guard standing at the top of the stairs leading up to the balcony.

"I think I'll 'patrol' the second floor." Shyren rasped. "You take the first."

"There's already a Horizon Guard there, though." Bestia said.

"I can get past them. Stick to the shadows."

"I see. Meet me here when you're done."

Shyren bowed their head, and slipped away into a side corridor. Bestia watched them go, puzzled. Was there another way up? She walked after, peeking in, and indeed, there was a staircase going up. Bestia thought she caught the end of a shadow slithering away. She pulled out the map Indo provided. The nearest target was in the kitchen. Bestia studied the route, and then started walking. Back straight and walk like you own the place, Shyren said. Easy enough.

As Bestia approached the kitchen, she was met with a cacophony of voices. Someone was berating someone, calling them an idiot sandwich. Another, quieter set of voices complained about a missing piece of meat. Bestia peered in. A crowd of people in immaculate white chef uniforms swarmed about the room. Exquisite dishes were lined up on a separate table. Bestia looked at her map, and then back at the kitchen, spotting a door in the back.

As she marched past the cooks, she noticed a wheeled cooler filled with portions of food, with a note attached to the outside. The note identified the food as palace guard rations, and threatened to starve the guards for a week if the rations were given to the guards before Vaylin's

speech. Bestia looked at the map again, and another node was in the guards barracks. She could probably get in by delivering the food. If the guards ate it before the designated time, it wasn't her responsibility.

Bestia slipped through the backdoor, and found herself in a small closet with a series of cables, fuses, and boxes on the back wall. She had no idea which of the boxes she was supposed to place the charge on. She placed it right in the middle, hoping that it had enough strength to take out whatever it needed to.

On the way back, she pushed the cooler out of the door, careful to not bump into anyone.

Shyren waited until no one was looking their way, and then called to the Force and became one with the shadows clinging to the walls of the narrow service staircase. The second floor was crawling with Horizon Guards. As powerful as the Outlander was, she wouldn't stand a chance against them alone. Keeping to the shadows, Shyren crept past the guards to their target.

They volunteered to come here, not only to assist Bestia, but to conclude some unfinished business they had. And for that, they had to find a specific Horizon Guard.

An image of a pasty girl with a face framed by long strands of dark hair, tied in several places. Her features looked like someone was turning them this way and that, and then left them like that. Her eyes were pale, and now that Shyren thought about it, very cold and unkind. How did they not see it?

The girl was called Jessa, and she was Shyren's Knight partner once. They were good friends. Until... Until Arcann came to power and declared the Scions criminals and ordered his Knights to hunt them down.

Shyren was guarding the escape of Heskai, his group of Scions, and Valkorion, when they came face to face with Jessa again. They remembered the relief they felt at that moment. They remembered hope. They asked Jessa to let them go, as their friend. She only smiled cruelly, and said she's not friends with stupid beasts.

Jessa attacked Shyren, held them down, and cut out their eye. She took her time carving with her lightsaber. Her grin was seared into Shyren's remaining eye. Shyren raised a hand to touch their scars, but it only met the material of their mask.

It has been years since the betrayal. Last time Shyren heard of Jessa, she was accepted into Horizon Guard. Which is why Shyren was here. They wanted revenge. But first, they had charges to place...

A noise drew them from their brooding. Sounds of growling and sloppy eating came from the room nearby. Shyren peered inside. The room was lit only by the electric blue of a holocom.

"Why the fuck do I have raw meat cravings, Jarak?!"

Shyren recognised the grating voice. Just their luck to stumble upon the Empress herself. They melded into the shadows once again, hovering by the door and listening, ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"I have no answers for that, but I do not think it is a result of the conditioning."

"Everything tastes like ashes. Except meat and blood."

There was a faint sound of tearing, followed by chewing. The Empress was definitely going to get parasites from that. Oh well. Maybe she deserved to get worms.

"I'll be departing for Nathema as soon as the event is over!"

The scene jostled something in Shyren's memory. They remembered having similar cravings shortly before their Chosen status manifested. They asked Heskai if he wanted to eat weird things as a Chosen of Scyva. He only shook his head at that.

Shyren shrugged, and slipped away before Vaylin could sense them.

The deep bass of an ominous dance song rattled Bestia's bones, and she stopped to listen. She recognized one of the pieces Tyrans laced with infrasound. The Dread Guards liked the slight sense of unease the songs gave them. And some species could appreciate the added bass. Bestia doubted that stuffy Zakuulans would be the same.

Her holocom beeped. A message from Shyren.

"Done. Don't wait for me, gotta do a thing." It said.

Bestia was done placing the charges as well, so now she had to wait for Vaylin's speech and Rammas's signal. She made her way back to the foyer, and took a position near a wall, watching the guests. Several infrasound-laden songs in, and Bestia could see the uncertainty on their faces, and sense their fear.

"... I feel like something horrible is going to happen." A woman said walking past, a glass of wine in one hand. "This alien music is so dark."

Suddenly, the music grew quiet, as did the guests. Everyone's attention was drawn to the balcony. A swarm of Holonet drones surrounded it. Vaylin appeared, followed by a Horizon Guard. She raised her arms, a small device in one hand.

"Zakuul! My empire! The Alliance tried to destroy me, but I ground them to dust. Now the Outlander hides in fear, as my fleet rips through the galaxy!"

There was a faint explosion, barely audible from where Bestia stood. It went unheard by the Empress. All the rebels were gathered on the floor below the balcony. She saw Indo among them. He had lacerations on his face, and his hair stood on end.

"I am the wrath of the dragon's fire. I am your Eternal Empress!" Vaylin proclaimed. "Witness now, the glorious execution of this rebellious rabble!"

She pressed the button. Silence fell upon the room. A silence that grew progressively more awkward the longer nothing happened. Vaylin's grin slowly morphed into an angry snarl. The rebels looked around fearfully.

And then music started playing again. Bestia immediately recognised the opening vocals to the song Rammas set as the signal. She tore the stuffy helmet off, followed by the gauntlets and about a half of each sleeve.

Bestia looked around in search of Shyren, but they were nowhere to be seen. The music blasted at full volume, something shattered high above, and glass shards rained onto the floor. People dressed in long black coats and fanged skull masks descended from above. A Holonet drone bumped into Bestia. She grabbed it, and then flipped it off.

A tall Herald of Zildrog approached the cage. Rammas waved excitedly.

"Hi, Jun!"

The Herald nodded.

"Step back, Avatar. I'm cutting the bars." He grumbled in a deep voice.

Rammas did as she was told, flattening herself against the opposite side of the cage. A neon green lightsaber hissed to life and cut a large hole in the cage. Jun then held out a hand.

"No one cages the Avatar of our god."

Rammas took his hand, and was carefully pulled out of the cage. She held out her wrists.

"Can you open these?"

Jun pulled a lockpick out of a pocket, and quickly removed the shackles. They dropped to the floor, and Rammas rubbed her wrists.

"Please tell me you brought a spare weapon?"

Jun reached for the spear hanging from his back. At the same time, Vaylin herself appeared from behind a corner. She held out the trigger device towards Rammas and furiously pressed the button several times. Nothing happened.

"Just say a word." Jun said.

"Nah, I think I can handle this. Prepare to run."

Rammas raised both her hands towards the Empress. She focused on the fear she had carefully stoked with the infrasound music, drawing it in, and mixing in a healthy dose of her own resentment towards Vaylin. Dark red energy enveloped her hands, formed into an orb, and flew towards Vaylin, hitting her in the face. Vaylin staggered, then stopped, and let out a scream that morphed into an inhuman screech.

"Now RUN." Rammas yelled.

Rammas vaulted over the railing, Jun following her. Lightning hit the cage. Glancing over at Vaylin, she saw a dark shadow tackle her. Both she and Jun used the Force to soften their landing, and bolted towards the exit.

Bestia watched from below as Rammas blasted Vaylin with Force Fear, and then escaped with her Herald ally. Shyren flew through the air, hit a long tapestry, and slid down it to the floor near Bestia. They were absolutely covered in blood. Bestia had no time to question it.

"Hiding in fear, you say?" She yelled, and flipped the Empress off. "Why, I'm right here. Say what you wanted to say to my face."

Vaylin immediately turned to glare down at her. In hindsight, challenging someone who had the high ground wasn't the most tactically sound decision, but Bestia had to draw Vaylin's attention, to provoke her to make an even bigger fool of herself. And also distract her from possibly chasing after Rammas.

Vaylin screamed again, enraged, and unleashed a torrent of lightning at Bestia. She barely had the time to block it with her lightsabers. The force of the blast moved her backwards on the smooth floor.

And then the floor gave way beneath Bestia. She and the rebels tumbled down onto packed dirt below. The Dread Master looked up, and saw Vaylin grinning again.

"I haven't fed them in a while just for this occasion!"

A growl drew Bestia's attention, and she saw several large beasts emerge from the shadows. One was about to pounce on Indo. Bestia took a deep breath, reaching for the Force. She took the fear from the beasts. She communicated with them, telling them that the rebels were not food, but that she'd help them eat those who starved them. Their growling ceased. Bestia looked over the rebels. They stood and sat huddled in the center of the pit. Indo limped towards Bestia.

"Get everyone to safety. I'll take the Scion and go after Vaylin." She examined the cuts on his face. There were five of them, parallel to each other. "Who did this?"

"The Empress did. Her nails are very sharp."

Shyren stared at the cuts on Indo's face as well. Their Scion mask was long lost, and they were frowning.

"Something is up with the Empress." They rasped.

"You think?!" Both Indo and Bestia exclaimed.

"I think she's a Chosen like me, and it's waking up."

"Understood. We'll deal with that if it comes up. Also, why are you covered in blood?"

The Scion grinned.

"Finished the business I had here."

"I see..."

The pit was too deep for the rebels to scale on their own, but there were a series of service entrances that led into the sublevel of the Palace. Bestia waited for Indo to lead the people out. When they were far enough away from the pit and the beasts, she leapt up, pushed off a wall, and jumped out of the pit. Shyren followed. They were on the ballroom floor again.

"I saw her run upstairs." Shyren said. "I think. There's a landing pad on the roof."

"Up we go, then."

Another powerful, Force-enhanced leap, and the two were on the balcony and running towards the elevators. A group of Horizon Guard stepped in their way, and they skidded to a stop. One of the Guards pointed at Shyren.

"Murderer!"

"Aw, shit. Guess I didn't hide the body well enough..." They said quietly.

Bestia charged at the guards, unleashing a roar laced with Force Fear. She clashed with the Guard who yelled at Shyren. The Scion melded into the shadows and appeared behind the other Guard, taking off his head with their lightsaber. Bestia overpowered her opponent and buried her lightsabers in his chest. She ducked under a wide sweep of the third guard, and slashed at their legs, before sending their head flying.

Bestia and Shyren stepped over the bodies and boarded the elevator. Bestia felt the bone-deep rage rising inside her again, and pushed it down. Why was the Dread Beast rising up so soon?

"So, what did you do?"

"Killed the one who took my eye. She was among the Horizon Guard."

"I see. Some good old vengeance then?"

"Yes. She was my friend once, but then she hunted me and killed several of the Scions."

"That's horrible."

"You want vengeance too."

"Yes. But mine is against a god, basically." Bestia sighed. "And to clear the way for it, I have to play a noble leader for a rebellion that would turn on me and the Dread Masters the moment the danger is over. What a pain in the ass. And after, we don't even have a home to return to."

"Why not find a new home?"

"I suppose that's a way out. I've been sick of Oricon lately. It wasn't my choice to settle there."

Shyren scratched their blood-caked head.

"Not to sound like Heskai but... Sometimes you have to float along the river of fate, and sometimes you have to get out and say 'fuck fate!' and do your own thing to reach the best outcome."

"Pretty much. Get ready, we're almost there."

The elevator stopped. A ding was heard, and the doors opened. A rooftop garden sprawled around them, with a wide path leading ahead. Vaylin stood on the path some distance away, clutching a lightsaber trident in both hands.

Bestia growled, and charged towards her. Shyren slipped into the shadows, and moved behind the hedges. Bestia jumped and slashed at Vaylin from above. Vaylin parried, although the force of the blow made her stumble backwards. Bestia landed behind her. Shyren rose from the shadows and slashed at Vaylin with their claws, grazing her back. The Empress let out a loud screech, and picked Shyren up with the Force, and threw them at Bestia. The Sith had to turn off her lightsabers, and the weight of the Scion sent them both tumbling.

To Bestia's surprise, Vaylin chose to run past them, and jump over the roof's railing. Bestia pushed Shyren off of her, and looked over the edge to see Vaylin driving away in a speeder.

"Sorry." Shyren rasped, getting back to their feet. "Looks like a fucking 'Yeet Shyren' day today..."

Bestia snarled at the speeder. Then took a deep breath, trying to steady herself. This wasn't Shyren's fault.

"It's okay. Let's get out of here before all of Zakuul's knights are on us."

Shyren followed her back to the elevators. Halfway down, the palace shook and the elevator screeched to a stop. Lights flickered.

"Ah shit, what now?" Bestia growled.

She cut a hole in the elevator's doors. It happened to be level with the floor, so she and Shyren got out with ease. However, they now had to get down to ground level on foot. Another explosion rocked the building, and a huge candelabra fell behind the two as they ran down a

corridor towards the stairs. Palace guards scrambled down alongside them, choosing to put their safety before striking down the Outlander.

Bestia and Shyren ran out of the main entrance and bolted towards the landing pad where the stolen Zakuulan shuttle waited for them. Bestia glanced up and saw several Eternal Fleet vessels raining fire on the Palace. A rogue blast fell far too close to them, and they clambered aboard the shuttle.

It was crowded with the Rebels they picked up. Rammas and her Herald friend sat in adjacent seats, talking quietly. Bestia plopped next to them.

"You okay?" She asked.

"Yeah. I mean. I'm alive and Vaylin didn't torture me. So yeah, I'm okay. I don't know if my message made it out but... what is Nathema?"

There was no getting out of it this time. Bestia shifted in her seat, trying to get comfortable.

"Nathema was the Sith Emperor's homeworld. It's not taught in Imperial schools for a reason. People learning an Vitiate eating all life on a planet wouldn't mesh well with the image of the benevolent god-Emperor he was trying to cultivate. So, few know. Where did you hear that name?"

"Vaylin was talking to someone."

"I heard her mention the place too." Shyren said. "And something's about conditioning."

Bestia stared at the floor. To an outside observer, she probably looked haunted. In a way, she was haunted. By memories of her own stay on the planet and the torment she went through. What did Vaylin have to do with Nathema? Did Vitiate try to make a backup body out of her too?

"I've been having weird flashbacks after meeting Vaylin. I think Nathema might hold answers. About my past."

"You might learn things that will fuck you up for the rest of your life. Do you really want these answers?" Bestia asked.

Rammas thought about it for a while. She was raised as a Sith. One of her mothers was a scholar, a historian of the Empire. To her, knowledge was power. And in a way, that mentality

passed down to Rammas. Information and knowledge were power, and a small, scrawny person like her had to get whatever advantage she could. In the end, Rammas decided, the answers had to be worth it.

"Yeah. I think I want to know. Maybe if I go there, I'll find clues to the parts of my memory that are locked away. I should also write to my parents. I haven't contacted them in a while."

Rammas kept in contact with her parents, and with her adopted brother and sister once in a while throughout the years, but with Zakuul messing with communications, it was difficult. At least the siblings weren't very likely to get on Zakuul's radar, being musicians. But Syrene and Aduumah were a Sith Lord and a Massassi princess.

Rammas looked out of the porthole. The palace was a pyre in the distance, the Eternal Fleet still firing upon it.

"Rest in peace, Git Gud shirt. And my lightsaber." She murmured.

Chapter End Notes

Flipped bird count: 15

Revelations

Chapter Summary

The hunt for Vaylin leads Bestia to Nathema, a place she'd rather forget. Rammas joins her, determined to find answers there, no matter the cost.

Chapter Notes

Music: Lorn - Acid Rain - slowed

Bestia leaned on the edge of the holotable, glaring at a projection of a planet. It was a barren thing, displayed in cyan hues of a hologram. Bestia, however, remembered it having that sickly

yellowish gray color that made her think of pus and rotting flesh. It was covered in deep craters that once held its oceans. She could feel the dust crunching in her mouth just from looking at it. StyraK hovered behind her. Rammas sat cross-legged on the table itself.

"There's only one place that I know of on Nathema that Vaylin could have gone to." Bestia said grimly. "Unless Vitiate has built another facility like that since my...stay."

Bestia took a deep breath. The memories came bubbling to the surface, and the Dread Beast was eager to feed upon them. For a far too long moment, the War Room melted away, replaced by gray corridors and white rooms. White hot metal tracing patterns in her back. A binding seal that didn't work. Hunger and filth and pain. No control. No power. StyraK's arms were around her, gentle and soothing. She wasn't on Nathema anymore. She was back on Odessen. She couldn't say she was safe, but she was away from Vitiate.

"Apologies." Bestia said. She looked down at her hand, the faintest outline of beastly claws fading away around it. Curses, the beast was waking up again. And so soon...

"Vitiate wanted to make a vessel out of her, to control the Dread Masters' power better." StyraK stepped in. "I do not know what Vaylin could want there."

"To unseal her power, and be free of Vitiate's conditioning." Said a deep, sorrowful voice. Everyone turned to see a hooded Scion standing by the entrance.

"Cael, is it?" Lana said. "This is an Alliance Command meeting. I'm afraid you have to leave."

"Let him speak." Bestia said.

Cael sighed, and unclasped his mask and removed his hood. Bestia raised her eyebrow spikes, while Theron stared in disbelief. Rammas waved at Cael, or rather, Valkorion, from her perch on the table. Lana looked less surprised than Bestia expected her to.

"You finally reveal yourself. Emperor Valkorion being among us was not on my list for today."

"You... knew?"

"Not fully, but I had a suspicion you weren't a simple Scion."

Valkorion bowed his head at her.

"I thought Senya was the only one who figured it out."

"You have quite a unique presence in the Force. Now I know why."

"Weird that Senya didn't post it all over the Holonet or something..." Rammas said.

"Senya's grief was...is with me, not him." Bestia sighed. "I guess she thought revealing him wouldn't hurt me, or thought it would be dishonourable to leak that information."

Valkorion avoided looking at Rammas.

"I would wager that even if she leaked the news of my survival, no one would have believed her. Considering the sort of things that are posted on the Holonet."

"True." Rammas said. "Anyway. Do you know what Vaylin wants with Nathema?"

"Vaylin inherited Vitiate's power in the Force. He feared her, and so he took her to Nathema and sealed her strength away." Valkorion's shoulders slumped, as if crushed by an immense weight. "He made me take her there. He made me watch."

Valkorion shook his head.

"While I was with Vaylin, I started getting these flashes of memories. One of them was a guy who looked like you, but with black hair and eyes."

"I...see. If you were there, I do not remember you"

"Maybe I was seeing Vaylin's memories somehow. I doubt it though. Basically if we're going to Nathema, I want to go." Rammas crossed her arms. There were answers on that planet, and Rammas was determined to unearth them, for better or for worse.

"The more, the merrier." Bestia said grimly. "Might as well stop running from my past..."

"I'm coming too." Styak said. "More firepower. And moral support."

Bestia embraced him, grateful. Styak's presence would make it somewhat easier. Or at least she hoped so. If she were to turn, at least no one would mourn the facility, and Styak could stop her. Bestia let go of Styak and turned to Valkorion.

"Do you want to join us?"

"I am afraid not. It is too much."

"I understand." Bestia put a hand on his shoulder.

"I do not wish to reveal myself to anyone outside this room. Not yet, at least."

"You'd have to, eventually. Someone needs to pick up Zakuul after we deal with Vaylin."

Valkorion looked up at Bestia. His gray eyes were full of sorrow and exhaustion. He looked to be on the verge of tears. It struck her for a moment how frail he was, especially compared to her and Styra. She could probably break him in half easily if she wanted to.

"I understand this may be an impossible task, but... spare her life, if you can."

Bestia looked down. For a moment, her hand still resting on the shorter human's shoulder appeared covered in blood. She blinked, and everything was back to normal. She felt sick.

"I will try. That's all I can really promise."

Somber thoughts followed Bestia to the shuttle. Lana and Theron chose to accompany Bestia, Rammas, and Styra to Nathema. Probably to oversee that the Dread Masters don't secretly squirrel away some secret research, Bestia thought. Like she wanted any part of what Vitiate did. Styra might be interested, he was better at detaching from his emotions, but Bestia doubted he wanted anything from Vitiate either. Hell, he even made a point to develop separate life prolonging rituals, to not depend on the Emperor.

Bestia saw the effects of immortality granted by Vitiate once. The second Wrath. She was the first, but after Vitiate failed to break her will, the title was taken away from her. Not that she cared much. The second Wrath was a Pureblood like her, made immortal in some fucked up mockery after he tried to kill Vitiate. Apparently, he still defected. And joined none other than Sharack, claiming she was some hero of prophecy, destined to kill Vitiate. Point was, he was unable to taste or feel. His existence was miserable. Bestia wondered where he went after Sharack's supposed death. She also wondered if Valkorion's immortality was similar. Maybe she'd ask when they came back.

They all felt it the moment their ship dropped out of hyperspace above Nathema. A sense of unease and hollowness. Like something was missing here, and it pulled at something inside them in a desperate bid to fill the void. Bestia remembered the feeling. And then it struck her that Styraak and Sharack had a similar presence to them after their return from the dead. They felt hollow, Sharack more so than Styraak. It took time to get used to it, but Bestia did her best to do it, mostly for Styraak's sake.

The planet below was a dusty brownish gray color. It was covered in immense craters that were once filled with water. Bestia knew that long ago, there were cities and sprawling fields and gardens covering much of the surface, but now not even a trace was visible from the orbit.

"Scans detect only one place emitting any signs of life."

"That must be the facility..." Bestia said.

"The Force feels unnatural here. Hollow."

"It's because it is hollow. Viti ate a bloody hole in it. As I'm the one who, unfortunately, had to spend several years here, and had to learn how to cope, I will do what we can to shield you."

"As will I." Said Styraak. "I don't feel the pull of this place."

"Let's get it over with..." Rammas muttered.

Rammas was the first out of the shuttle when it landed some distance away from the single intact building. Her feet kicked up light grey dust as she walked up to the edge of the cliff and looked down. She could see ruins at the bottom. They reminded her of the dark temple of Dromund Kaas, but more ancient and sharp. She then stared up and forward, at the facility not far off. Her answers lay there. She squinted her eyes, making out small figures milling about at the entrance. An Eternal Fleet ship hovered above.

Her vision blurred, and for a moment, she was looking into a different time. She saw the facility receding into the distance, and she was looking at it over someone else's shoulder. It was dark. Someone was chasing them. Rammas shook her head, and was back in the present.

"We'll have company." She said to Bestia as the group started the trek towards the building. "At least three people at the entrance. Probably more inside."

"Vaylin's guard. Or the local population."

"There's people living here?"

"Fanatics, kept alive by Vitiate." Bestia shuddered. "Immune to Force Fear, not immune to getting punched in the face."

"Are they immune to lightsaber in the back?"

"Nope."

"Good to know. I'll scout ahead."

"Will you be alright?" Bestia looked down at Rammas with concern.

"Yeah." Rammas replied after thinking for a few moments. "Even if the answers hurt me, I chose to look for them."

"What about the Force in this place? I won't be able to protect you at a distance."

Rammas scratched her head.

"The emptiness here feels familiar. I have a feeling I will know what to do."

Bestia let out a sigh.

"I trust your judgement."

Rammas smiled, nodded, and slunk off into the shadows of the rocky spires rising around them. Despite the Force having been drained from Nathema, Rammas was able to call on enough of it to cloak her presence. That, combined with the stealth field generator, hid her from both eyes and senses long enough to sneak past the Horizon Guard at the facility gate.

The moment Rammas was inside, a painful sense of familiarity hit her. Somehow she knew this place. The corridors were dark, dusty, and unkempt, but Rammas knew them. She knew that if she went forward and took a right and a stair she'd come to a courtyard. She did just that, and crouched behind a shattered window when she heard voices.

She peered down, and saw Vaylin surrounded by dead beasts, and in front of her - an alien in white robes. Vaylin was hunched over, practically snarling at the alien.

"Why did your beasts attack me, Jarak?! I'm an Empress, not a fucking prisoner!"

"The beasts don't respond to titles. They respond to fear and hate." The alien, Jarak, had a mechanical cold voice. Rammas remembered it from the conversation she overheard back at the palace. He was right about fear and hate, Rammas could sense both coming off the Empress in waves.

"Ugh, whatever. You said you made a breakthrough?"

Jarak nodded, and half turned.

"Everything is prepared. In the main lab."

Rammas watched Vaylin follow the scientist away into the depths of the facility, then slowly backed away. Something rolled, disturbed by Rammas's foot, and she bent down to examine it. It was a small wooden figurine, dusty and long forgotten. Rammas picked it up and turned it over in her hands, recognising it as a Tooka cat. It was the same figurine she saw in a flashback not so long ago, she was certain of it. Rammas put it in her pocket.

Standing there alone, Rammas also realised she wasn't bothered by the emptiness. She adapted to it, like she had adapted to the blasts of Dark side energy emitted by the Phobis Device.

Rammas found Bestia, Lana, and Styrak at the entrance. Several bodies surrounded them: Zakuul Knights, a Horizon Guard, and several humans in ornate robes with knives clutched in their hands.

"Saw Vaylin go towards some kinda lab. Also saw a couple more knights and those robed guys. Otherwise the facility is pretty empty."

"Let's go then. If we go quickly, we can catch up with her."

Bestia strode into the facility, her companions following. The facility was, indeed, mostly deserted. The few Zakuul Knights they encountered weren't a match for them, too overwhelmed by the emptiness in the Force. And the local zealots were not immune to lightsabers.

Rammas led the group towards the courtyard. Up close, it turned out to be a sad little excuse for a garden. Several gnarled, half dead trees rose from the barren ground. Dry and withered brown grass rustled as they made their way to the opposite side of the yard, past the dead beasts.

Bestia shivered, looking down at the creatures. Even though Vaylin was lashing out, she did them a service by putting them out of their misery. The animals were barely recognisable as whatever species they originally were. They were emaciated and their skin was one giant burn scar mixed with scabs. Bestia thought one of them could have been a Nexu cat.

Rammas crept ahead and peered into the hallway. Vaylin and the scientist were long gone, and the hallway led into a large room. Rammas turned to the others and beckoned them.

The large room was dark and mostly occupied by large tubes, clustered together in groups of four. They were filled with a murky liquid and figures floated inside some of them. Desks lined the walls. Every horizontal surface was covered in a layer of dust.

Bestia didn't remember this room. Her stay was mostly confined to a cell and several different torture rooms. She hoped they wouldn't have to pass any of them. She walked up to one of the occupied tubes and brushed the thick dust off the glassy surface. Inside was a body, dressed in ragged brown robes. A human, their face twisted into one of pain and fear. Long dead.

"Guess me, Vaylin, and Valkorion weren't the only lucky guests..." She said grimly.

Rammas wandered over to one of the tables. A datapad sat on it, barely visible under a layer of dust. Rammas picked it up, blowing the dust from it and holding back a sneeze. Out of curiosity, she pressed the power button on it.

Despite the time it must have spent sitting on that table, the device powered on. A holo of Jarak, the scientist Rammas saw before, appeared above it. Before he could start speaking, Rammas scurried over to the others with her find.

"The beasts ripped a young man apart. He died screaming in front of Vaylin, but she made no move to help. Things are progressing well."

A faint memory bubbled up to the surface of Rammas's mind. Her hiding somewhere and trying to block out the horrible screams coming from another part of the facility.

"There are other entries here..." Rammas said.

"Let's hear them." Bestia said, frowning.

Rammas played the other entries in the journal. They painted a horrific picture of a child subjected to torture and horrors. The only limitation Vitiate gave the scientist was that Vaylin was to be left alive.

"That's horrible." Rammas said, once the final entry finished playing. "Now I feel bad for her."

"I wonder if there's coming back from that." Lana mused.

"I recovered." Bestia looked down at her feet. "Mostly. But I was an adult. And I had support when I got out. Vaylin was a kid and she doesn't have anyone..."

Bestia paused to collect herself.

"Also, whatever Vitiate did, he hadn't perfected it at that point. Me and Valkorion were his prototypes."

Bestia spat on the ground. Now she felt responsible for Vaylin's fate, even though she couldn't have predicted it. Vitiate using the methods he used on her and Valkorion on someone else was out of her hands.

Rammas went through the datapad, hoping to find some answers about herself, but it didn't have much aside from the journal entries.

"I'd imagine she'd do anything to break free from this. I know I would..." Bestia said.

And she did. She turned to the Dread Beast for it, something she vowed to not wake up since she massacred that rebellion on Ziost as a mere apprentice. It so happened that at the same time, Styrak and the others came storming in demanding her release. Everyone came, except Raptus.

Suddenly, a loud screech pierced the silence, and the ground shook. Things fell from the tables, the already dim lights flickered. The air felt charged with electricity. A massive presence unfurled itself in the Force, pushing away the emptiness.

"Well, fuck." Bestia said.

"This is one of the strongest presences I've ever felt." Styrak said.

Rammas was thinking whether to leave the datapad or take it when someone ran out of the hallway and barreled into her. She fell onto the floor, quickly rolled away and glared at whoever toppled her. Jarak, the alien scientist, was slowly scrambling to his feet before her.

"You." He said, fixing her with a stare. His mechanical voice carried a small amount of surprise. "I remember you."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Rammas sneered.

Bestia walked over and picked the scientist up by the scruff of his robes. She held him up easily.

"You're the guy in the holos. What's going on?" Bestia snarled into his face.

Despite everything, Jarak turned his head to Rammas.

"You'll find your answers in the vault."

The building shook again.

"You will also find shelter from the energy blast there."

Bestia shook Jarak.

"What energy blast? What in the fuck is going on?! Do I need to use Force Fear on you?!"

"Vaylin... something went wrong." Jarak was sufficiently terrified without any Force Fear." Her power is racing out of control! When it erupts, the entire asylum will be destroyed."

"I see. So this vault is going to withstand this?"

Jarak nodded his head eagerly, the tubes of his breathing apparatus dangling a little.

"I can guide you to it, Dread Master. You'll need to protect me from the beasts and keepers. The Force blasts made them aggressive."

Bestia dropped him.

"Let's go then."

The scientist got up and scurried ahead. He wasn't lying about the beasts and the zealots. The winding hallways deeper in the facility were full of them. Bestia tried to communicate with the animals, but was met with a wall of rage, fear, and hatred. They had to fight both the animals and their handlers, yet neither were a match for the four Sith.

Jarak led the group down several levels, into tunnels hewn into the rock below the facility. And yet even here they could feel Vaylin's magnified Force presence, and hear the howling.

They came to a dead end in a tunnel, capped off by a wall with a huge door in it. Jarak stepped up to it and started punching in access codes, while the sith crowded around him, looking back at the tunnel uneasily. They could sense something coming for them, and deep down each knew they didn't want to be here when it arrived. A flash of teal drew Rammas's attention, and she looked up. Bolts of lightning crawled along the walls and ceiling of the tunnel they just came from.

Finally, the vault door opened with an ear splitting screech. Everyone scrambled in, and Bestia pulled the door shut behind them. Moments later, she had to jump back as odd teal electrical sparks flew from the door. The ground shook violently, sending all five members of the group staggering. And then it was quiet.

"Well. We're alive." Bestia gave the door a shove." Door's fried though."

She loomed over Jarak menacingly.

"This place better have another exit."

Jarak nodded, trying to seem smaller.

"There is. You'll need to turn the backup generator to access it. It's in the very back of the vault."

He pointed a clawed finger over his shoulder, into the darkness.

"Let me guess, it's where all of Vitiate's worst and most dangerous shit is?"

"Yes, and he left guardians behind to guard his treasures. I suspect they're quite hungry after several centuries."

The interior of the vault was dark and quiet and dusty. Rammas sneezed, the normally mundane sound a monstrous intrusion of the century long silence. Everyone froze, expecting something to happen in response, but nothing did.

Rammas crept forward, drawn to something in the room ahead. Her old tomb-exploring instincts kicked in, and her progress was slow as she checked for traps and possible pressure plates.

She made her way into the vault proper, a large octagonal room, lit by dim white lights. Some sort of device sat in the center, and shelves lined the walls. Rammas could make out holocrons, tablets, and small devices on the shelves. All radiated dark side energy. However, one stood out to her, a simple-looking holocron on one of the shelves. Rammas stepped lightly towards it, still mindful of her surroundings.

Bestia and the others followed the short Sith, and fanned out around the room, looking for the backup generator. It was too empty for Bestia's liking. It meant there was some defense system they haven't tripped up yet.

Rammas reached out for the holocron. It started to glow at the proximity to her hand, and she picked it up. It unfurled and glowed as the Pureblood held it in both hands. Bestia and Styrak

made a move to stop her, but were too late. They still moved in close, to interfere were something to happen.

A recording began to play. Two Pureblood men, both short and slim with very long dark hair, one in a simple yet regal red robe with gold accents, and the other dressed in the familiar red, black, and white bone-adorned robes of a Dread Master. They stood together, and Rammas recognised one of them as Raptus. He handed the other man a vial and a lock of red hair.

"You have done well, my son. These will help create the perfect vessel for my power."

"What the fuck." Bestia whispered. "That's Vitiate. And Raptus."

The man's voice was cold and emotionless and ancient. Rammas shivered listening to it. Why was this so familiar?

"I must return to my prison." Raptus said with disdain.

Bestia and Styak exchanged a disbelieving look. Another quiet "what the fuck" was released into the silence of the vault. Bestia could feel quiet anger rise inside Styak, and it mirrored her own feelings. Although her rage would be anything but quiet when she got her hands on Raptus.

The recording ended, and another began. It showed Vitiate with his back turned. His hair was floor length and so dark it seemed to consume light. Past him was a row of large tubes, most empty. Vitiate stared at the single occupied tube as a small figure floated inside, curled up.

"The backup vessel is almost complete, although it will take a bit of time until it matures enough to withstand my power."

The image changed again, to a shot of a small gray cell. It had a bed, a desk, and a small wardrobe. A small child sat on the bed, a Sith Pureblood with black hair that had a white spot in it, dark orange skin, and taloned feet. The child looked up, and Rammas found herself staring at her own reflection, complete with pitch black eyes and horizontal pupils.

Some sort of wall shattered inside Rammas's mind. She yelped, dropped the holocron, and staggered back. Memories came flooding in all at once, and she fell backwards. Styraak caught the short Sith when she fell, and Bestia caught the holocron.

"Okay what the fuck did we just watch?!"

A rumbling growl responded to her. Bestia turned around, to see a monster backhand Jarak across the room. Good, at least this was straightforward. Just a monster in an ancient Sith vault to fight. Beats the mind fuckery any day.

Bestia handed the holocron to Styraak who pocketed it. Then, she let out a roar and charged at the creature, both lightsabers at the ready. Styraak and Lana shot lightning at it and between the three of them, the monster was down quickly.

The creature's death seems to have set something off. The upper half of the device in the center of the room lifted into the ceiling, revealing a pedestal with another holocron on it. Bestia glared at it apprehensively. What kind of spicy Vitiante secrets did this thing hold? Bestia hoped, for a moment, that maybe it could hold an admission to her mother's murder. Unlikely, but still.

That hope was shattered when a ghostly figure of a Sith Pureblood man appeared in front of the group. He looked a bit like Vitiante, although he was taller and had regular Sith eyes and much shorter hair. He looked Bestia and her companions over with disdain.

"Have you come to torment me again?"

Rammas blinked as she came to, and sat up on the floor.

"Who are you?" She asked the Pureblood.

He looked down at her, and flinched momentarily, before regaining his composure.

"You have his eyes, but you are not Tenebrae."

The words "child of Tenebrae" echoed inside Rammas's mind. She got up.

"Tenebrae made me. I think. What's your deal? Are you a ghost?"

"I'm trapped between life and death by my low-born son."

Rammas's mind blanked out.

"So you're my grandpa then?" She blurted out, before erupting into hysterical laughter. Vitiate was basically her father, and this guy was Vitiate's father. Might as well laugh at it.

"Man. There's a fucking Vitiate family reunion in this bitch, huh?" Bestia put her hands on her hips. "Why'd he put you in a holocron?"

"Because he hates me."

"Is there anyone he doesn't hate?"

"Himself?" Styrak guessed.

"Do you have a name?"

"I am Lord Dramath. A thousand years ago, I used to rule this world. Then Tenebrae, the least of my offspring, murdered me and put my spirit into this holocron. And now I have to talk to what looks like some Massassi brute and Vitiate's equally scrawny offspring."

"Maybe you should have used protection when fucking around. Then we wouldn't be in this mess." Bestia sneered. "And Nathema would still be a nice lush planet."

"Yea and I wouldn't have to have an existential crisis over being a demon spawn..." Rammas muttered, before wandering off, Styrak trailing after her.

"So, what do you want?" Bestia asked.

"To die. My existence is suffering. I can also help you defeat my son."

"Help how?"

"This holocron can weaken him."

"I see. And it doesn't need to contain your spirit to work?"

"No. You can release me."

Bestia sighed.

"You sound like a complete asshole, but even you don't deserve to suffer Vitiate."

Bestia picked up the holocron. She focused on the Force weaving through it, holding the ghost captive. One by one, she undid the bindings, and Dramath simply vanished with a quiet sigh of relief.

Rammas wandered back towards the door and pushed at it. It was sealed shut and fried, as Bestia had said. She shrugged, and walked along the wall to the back of the vault, looking for another exit. Might as well be useful, right? StyraK still trailed after her.

"Are you going to kill me?"

"No. Why?"

"I'm a fucking Vitiate spawn."

"You have not acted against us. Therefore, there is no reason to destroy you."

"You make it sound so simple."

Rammas peered into a dark alcove.

"I think I found the other door and the generator."

StyraK helped Rammas pull the ancient lever. The generator hummed back to life, and a smaller door opened in the back of the room.

Bestia and Lana joined Styrak and Rammas by the exit. Bestia peered out cautiously. It was quiet in the tunnel outside. Eerily so. No howling, no screeching, no lightning. The Force felt even more dead than when they arrived here. Focusing, Bestia could sense Vaylin, but her presence was distant.

"I think she's gone." Bestia said.

"We should be going too. I have a bad feeling." Lana said.

Bestia was first out of the vault. The tunnel led to stairs going up, back to the facility proper. Lana's holocom beeped when they were climbing up. It was Theron.

"You all need to haul jets. Vaylin is about to blow this place to bits! I'll pick you up at the entrance!"

Bestia let out a long loud groan.

"Can shit just stop happening for a bit?"

Shit did not stop happening. Something exploded in the distance, shaking the building and making dust rain on them. Styrak picked up Rammas under one arm. Dark wings appeared behind him, and he flew up the stairs to catch up with the others.

They ran through the hallways, now empty and burned. Bodies of beasts and humans littered the floor, some charred and some bleeding.

Another explosion boomed somewhere behind them. Small bits of debris fell from above, followed by a larger chunk of the ceiling. Bestia saw teal lightning again, probably from whatever ritual Vaylin had conducted. It was crawling towards them from a side hallway. Bestia broke into a sprint, the others following.

The doorway of the facility crumbled behind them as they ran out. Bestia stopped for a moment, watching dust and flames rise from the building. Between the aftermath of Vaylin's ritual and the help of the Eternal Fleet ships above, the building fell apart quickly.

A shuttle was waiting for them, and they quickly crowded inside. There, all of them could finally take a breath and let everything sink in. Rammas sat as far from the others as she could.

"Are you alright?"

Rammas shook her head, her face buried in her knees. Bestia reached out and gently patted her shoulder.

"I'm scared." Rammas eventually said. "I'm scared I'll be the same as him. But also, that you and my parents will disown me."

"I can't speak for your mothers, but we won't abandon you because of who your father is."

"As I said back in the vault, you've never shown any malice towards us." Styrak added.

Rammas sniffled and managed a small smile.

"Thank you."

"It's no problem. You are not him. You grew up away from him. And it's up to you to continue not being him."

"Yeah. Me and Raptus being siblings explains a whole fucking lot though. Couldn't stand him from the beginning."

"It sure does..." Bestia said.

They fell silent, each of them alone with their thoughts. Rammas stared out of the porthole, her mind trying to process the ramifications of her discovery. She was an artificially created daughter of Vitiate and someone from Bestia's family. Either Bestia herself, or Ha'nadi the first Dread Master. Did her heritage come with the same powers as Vitiate's? She definitely had the same eyes. Was there potential to devour life on a planetary scale buried somewhere deep within her? Could she learn to control these powers the same way as any other Force ability?

Rammas reached into her pocket and got out the wooden cat. She now remembered a human girl trapped on Nathema with her giving it to her. Rammas dropped it when someone carried her away one night. The girl was Vaylin, she was pretty sure of it.

Rammas recalled the time when Raptus tried to kill her by activating the Phobis Device in the Dread Council chamber when she was standing right under it. She didn't die. Yes, the pure dread she had experienced was incomparable to anything else, but then she started absorbing the energy, and sort of became one with it. Whatever entity the Device channeled eventually recognised her.

When the other Dread Masters arrived, Rammas stood under the fading light of the Device, while Raptus was backing away. He was the one terrified now. Somehow he managed to talk his way out of having his ass kicked to the next galaxy. Still, Rammas could see the distrust that at least Bestia and Styrak displayed towards him after that.

Her mind wandered to the Dashade companions her friend Hu'un had. She wondered where both of them were. Dashade had a similar ability to absorb the Force to Vitiate's, and Khem Val seemed to be in perfect control of it. But also, to him it was simply a matter of sustenance. He simply ate Force. Rammas still needed to eat regular food, or she'd get faint.

Rammas also needed to tell her parents about the revelation. Get that hurdle out of the way. Whatever their reaction may be, it felt wrong to Rammas to hide it from them. She had a hopeful feeling they'd be okay with it. After all, they took her in, hid her from the Emperor's people, and raised and loved her.

Raptus was never on our side, Bestia thought, over and over again. Raptus is a traitor. Has always been. The thought ran circles in her mind, filling it with deep rage. She could sense Styrak seething next to her. This explained so much. Raptus was among the individuals that Vitiate called together to master Ha'nadi's Phobis Devices. However, he was always a mystery. Even Tyrans and Brontes couldn't find anything about him. It's like he never existed.

After Vitiate himself killed the first Dread Master, Bestia and Calphayus were called in to clean up Vitiate's own mess. Bestia suspected Vitiate simply had a hate boner for the Rak'shi family because the first Dread Master rejected him or something. That, and Bestia and her father were

the only witnesses. So it was prudent to keep them close and unable to reveal the truth. And Raptus was likely sent in to oversee all five of the other Dread Masters, but specifically Bestia and Calphayus.

Bestia suddenly felt dirty. Somehow Raptus managed to talk and mind control his way out of Belsavis prison, and instead of freeing the others, he fucked off to Nathema. Knowing that someone touched her and took her blood and hair, while she was sleeping in her cell with so many drugs in her system that it could probably kill a rancor, made Bestia feel unclean and violated. The other option was that he took the hair from her mother's corpse resting in her tomb on Oricon. The blood had to be from Bestia, though, and she didn't know which option was worse.

The others would have to know of this. The Dread Masters had to know about Raptus's ongoing betrayal. Where was he anyway? There was also the matter of dealing with him once he was found. Killing him was tempting, but not an option. Styrak's death had wrecked the Dread Masters through their shared Force bond. Even with Styrak back, and Rammas also a part of the union, Bestia doubted it would weather another similar blow. However, if the Dread Masters could figure out a way to cut Raptus off, he could be killed without damaging the others. There were also other options. He could be put in a stasis pod. Styrak could cut him off from the Force. His tongue could be cut out to prevent him from talking his way out of things ever again.

Lana had to sit with the three brooding Sith the whole way back to Odessen. She couldn't blame them, the revelations they faced were a lot to deal with. Her own concerns were about Vaylin. The Empress successfully unleashed her powers, and was probably on her way back to Zakuul. Deep down Lana knew Vaylin would make a move against the Alliance soon.

No Rest For The Wicked

Chapter Summary

Vaylin attacks Odessen much sooner than everyone thought. Bestia faces her inner demons.

Chapter Notes

Music for the chapter

Terror Syndrome - Creature Feature

Berserk 2016 OST - My Brother

Marches - Ashes to Ashes

Dead Can Dance - Host of the Seraphim (Bestia looks over the devastation she had caused)

No one aboard the small ship expected the Empress to make her move THIS soon. The moment the shuttle dropped out of hyperspace, the group was confronted with rows upon rows of Eternal Fleet vessels floating in orbit over Odessen. Bestia gawked at the sight, a scowl painted on her face.

"Well, that was fucking quick."

Her holocom beeped, and she picked it up. Styrak and Lana crowded around her to listen. An image of a brown-furred vaguely feline alien with deep bags under his eyes appeared. Bestia wasn't sure if the bags were a trait of his species or a result of exhaustion.

"Commander? Do you copy? Odessen is under attack!"

"Yeah, I can see that, Bey-Wan. Looks like the whole fleet is here."

"One of your Dread Master friends warned us, but we're still at a disadvantage."

"Where's the Gravestone?" Lana cut in.

"Rerouting the call to Koth."

The image changed to that of Koth and Brontes.

"They caught us in the dry dock. We'll need a few minutes to recalibrate the systems."

"Don't tell me you need three minutes." Bestia groaned.

"It is closer to two and a half. Then Zakuul will know fear." Brontes said. "Still, Tyrans and the others could use some reinforcements. You will likely find him flying around the outside of the ship and coordinating the defences."

"Got it. We'll head there."

The shuttle landed in a clearing by a lake. As soon as the four Sith disembarked, Theron took off to help with the defence.

Bestia faintly recognised the area they were in. She enjoyed getting away from the base and exploring the woods and cliffs around it, and over time, learned the land fairly well. Sometimes Styra joined her. If her memory was correct, the gorge she was facing led back to the base.

Styra crouched, dark wings coming into existence from behind him.

"I'll fly ahead and help Tyrans." He said.

He leapt into the air, weaved around a cliff and disappeared from view. Bestia watched him, then turned to her companions and rolled her shoulders.

"Let's go. I'm in the mood to scrap some droids."

Bestia grinned and set off in a run. As she did, she called out to the beasts of Odessen that lurked in the woods and rocks around her. Soon, the three Sith had a sizable following of various animals around them.

A rumble of thunder caused the group to look up. The top of a tall cloud emerged from behind the bend. It appeared unnaturally quick, and a bolt of lightning struck a passing Eternal Empire transport, sending it spiraling down.

The beasts overwhelmed the Zakuul forces they came into contact with, or at least distracted them enough to be easy pickings for the Sith. Rammas faded in and out of view, appearing behind people and running them through with her lightsaber. Bestia let out a roar that left the human enemies paralyzed by fear, then charged. Lana fell back and took on a more supportive role, striking at those Bestia, Rammas, or the beasts haven't gotten to yet, and healing the two other Sith.

Between the beasts, the Sith, and Bestia's Force Fear, the outpost was empty within minutes. But even with the help of the wildlife, they were too slow. Then Bestia's gaze fell upon the empty walker.

"How about we do some grand theft whatever the fuck this is." She said, running over to it.

"You don't want to let her drive..." Rammas muttered to Lana.

"Understood."

Lana caught up with Bestia.

"I can drive. You can operate the weapons."

"I don't think there's enough space for three inside. Rammas, you get the weapons. I'm going on the roof!"

"I...suppose this may work too."

Lana and Rammas climbed inside, while Bestia leapt onto the walker, balancing on the very top. When the machine began moving, Bestia let out a triumphant howl, and sent a wave of fear rushing forward.

Human targets scattered before Bestia and her team, and were easily picked off by the beasts. Droids and the more resilient knights of Zakuul were exterminated by the walker's weaponry.

They came across another walker, and Bestia jumped on top of it, jamming her lightsabers into the viewport, killing the driver. The machine wobbled and fell over as Bestia rolled off of it.

Sadly, the group had to abandon their new ride soon after. A fallen ship blocked the gorge, leaving only a small gap between it and the ground. The Sith themselves could fit through it easily, but the walker was too large.

When they emerged on the other side, they saw the Gravestone in its dry dock. A forest of catwalks and stairs surrounded it, with Alliance forces standing there, shooting at the enemy. An ominous thundercloud swirled above. The ship was surrounded by Zakuulan forces, and a noticeable pile of charred remains ringed the base of the platform.

Bestia broke into a run, Lana and Rammas following. Up close, Bestia saw Tyrans zipping around on shining metal wings, throwing blasts of lightning and fear at the enemies below. Styraak stood on top of the Gravestone, arms raised. He did a throwing motion, and a bolt of lightning struck a group of droids that got too close.

With a metallic groan, the Gravestone started moving. Styraak's thunderstorm dissolved, and he flew out of the way, landing next to Bestia. The ground shook, and Bestia spun around. A large group of Zakuul walkers was approaching, guns trained on her and Styraak. Styraak raised a hand, about to fling lightning at them.

Neither he, nor the walkers, got the chance to attack. A ray of green energy struck the walkers and obliterated them where they stood. Bestia let out a whistle.

"The upgrades function perfectly." Brontes's smug voice came from the earpiece. Koth cheered in the background.

"We do have a problem."

Tyrans was patched into the call.

"Vaylin still has a huge advantage in numbers. We will not hold out much longer, even with our power."

"What do you have in mind?" Bestia asked.

"The fleet is controlled through the Gemini frequency. There's only a few points where you can send direct orders, and fewer people who have access to them."

"So, if we remove Vaylin, the fleet will stop."

"We do not know what will happen, exactly." Brontes sounded pensive. "It may stop, yes. But it may also revert to some sort of default protocol. And we do not know what that entails."

"I think it's worth a try. How do we get to her? She's with her fleet."

"Lure her out. She is angry at you and Rammas for messing with her." Tyrans said. "Make yourself as much pain in her ass as you can."

"Oh, that's easy. Just kill a bunch of her people, and refuse to die." Rammas quipped.

The plan was easy in theory, but much more grueling in reality. The two Sith had no idea how many droids they had to scrap and how many soldiers and knights they had to kill before the Empress took notice. At least there was no shortage of either. Bestia blasted the human troops with Force fear, and set beasts upon the rest. Rammas moved unseen through the woods, striking at single targets and disappearing before they could retaliate.

They found themselves in the middle of another small outpost, taking a few precious moments to rest, when Bestia found a communication station. An idea formed in her mind. The device belonged to Zakuulan forces, and could potentially be used to reach Vaylin.

Bestia called Rammas over.

"You lived on Zakuul for a while, can you read what it says and find what frequency goes to Vaylin?"

"Yeah, sure."

Rammas pored over the computer, looking through what essentially was a very fancy contacts list. Finally, she found it. A frequency, marked with all kinds of warnings. "Do not call this line unless it's the only option!!!" and "only call this if you want to die!!!!". The Sith wondered if the

warnings applied to Arcann, Vaylin, or both. She pointed the frequency out to Bestia and stepped back, content to let her do the talking.

A holo of the Empress appeared, her back to Bestia. She turned around and Rammas flinched, and Bestia raised an eyebrow spike slightly.

"Oh, hello there." Vaylin said. "We were just talking about you."

Vaylin was hunched over. Her arms seemed much longer than they used to be, and definitely much too long for a human. They were wrapped in stained bandages. Her face appeared stretched out into an odd shape, somewhere between human and vaguely canine. Her eyes were bloodshot and glowed a fiery yellow of someone neck-deep in the Dark Side.

"What the fuck." Rammas muttered, making sure she's out of reach of the device's camera.

"I was planning space on my walls for those pretty masks of yours."

"You'll have to come for them yourself." Bestia snarled.

"I intend to. But first, I'll kill all your friends. And grind the Alliance into dust. Would be really nice for my garden."

Rammas found her voice and stepped from behind Bestia.

"Dude. You're not scary. I pretty much ruined your party with some music and a single fearblast."

Rammas flipped a bird at the camera.

"Get good, 'Empress'."

"YOU." Vaylin pointed a gnarled, clawed finger at Rammas. "Your life ends tonight, little bird."

Bestia and Rammas exchanged glances as the call fizzled out.

"It's almost like she hates you more than she hates me." Bestia said.

"No shit."

Bestia patched herself into the general Alliance frequency.

"Vaylin's going to be here soon. I need status updates."

Lana stayed behind with the group that defended the Gravestone, and was currently moving towards the base to regroup.

Styrak was on the roof of the base, about to summon another Force storm.

Tyrans and Brontes have joined up with Calphayus to coordinate the defence. They were inside the base now, in the war room. Calphayus looked shaken.

"What's wrong?" Bestia asked.

Calphayus shook his head.

"Mu'hass is in danger, and the Dread Beast comes."

Bestia's heart sank. She frantically searched through the frequencies until she found Mu'hass.

Mu'hass appeared above the device, clearly backed against a wall. He held his lightsaber up defiantly. A short Twi'lek girl cowered behind him, hand clutching at her shoulder, a blaster held in the other. Her attention was split between answering the call and fighting back.

"Mu'hass!"

"Me and Mu'hass took out their guns!"

"And they're not happy about it!" Mu'hass added.

"Hold on, I'm on my way!"

"Please hurry!"

Several Horizon Guards came into the view. Mu'hass let out a roar that sent them staggering away. A volley of blasterfire was unleashed at him, but he threw up a shield. It held, for now, but Bestia could see exhaustion slowing his movements. Neither Mu'hass nor his shield would hold up forever.

The image distorted and glitched out. Instead, Vaylin appeared above the communicator again.

"That is your son, right? Surrender." Vaylin growled, her warped face splitting into a grin. "Or he dies."

Black tendrils snaked their way from the edges of Bestia's vision as fury rose inside her. It had been rattling the bars of its cage ever since Nathema, ready to rain devastation once again. Vaylin's mocking voice did the entire cage in.

Rammas stumbled away, hit by an oppressive feeling of dread. She retreated until her back hit the almost vertical slope of the ravine they were in.

She watched as dark tendrils erupted from all over Bestia's body, obscuring it. Bestia let out a loud distorted roar and the mess of darkness resolved into the shape of a huge creature. The Dread Beast was much taller than Bestia, the body completely black with the exception of the head and claws. Those were golden, the head protected by a tough looking plate shaped somewhat like Bestia's mask: two wings coming from around the eyes, and a tall central crest. A bright red mane flowed from the back of the beast's head.

Rammas shrunk and hid behind a rock, cloaking her presence as much as she could. She hasn't felt fear like this since her ordeal with the Phobis Devices. This was something ancient and primordial. The fear the earliest prey creatures felt when hunted by the first predators. Deep down she knew that if the Dread Beast found her, it would smear her across the ground.

Rammas risked a peek from her hiding place. The beast was sniffing around, its three tails swishing around. Rammas swore she saw maws and gnashing teeth at the ends of each tail. Finally, the beast roared again, and sprinted forth along the canyon. Rammas followed it, but quickly fell far behind. Her short legs and sneaking pace were no match for the beast.

Bestia left an easy trail to follow. Vines of Dreadseed corruption shot out of the ground where she'd rampaged through. They coiled around trees, strangled droids, and impaled people, both dead and alive. Soon Rammas started finding people, droids, and their parts, strewn about in pools of blood. Rammas steeled herself and continued.

Mu'hass was tired. He's been fighting off waves of droids and Zakuulan forces for what felt like hours, and even his endurance was running out. And now he was surrounded by powerful Force users. Not to mention, more droids. Behind him, Vette slumped by the wall, no longer able to lift up her blaster.

His shield was almost out of energy, and he himself could barely block incoming attacks. His back was against a wall, and he couldn't see where the nearest Alliance forces were.

This is how we die, he thought. Alone and cornered in an unfair fight. He'd never move back to Rishi to enjoy peaceful days at the beach like he wanted to. Or find a partner. He knew Vette wanted to return stolen Twi'lek artifacts back to Ryloth, and she wouldn't be able to do that either.

Suddenly, he heard screams, and his attackers turned away to face in their direction. He started retreating sideways along the wall, hoping the distraction would last.

A dark vine erupted from the ground, running through several skytroopers in the back. Mu'hass recognised it.

"Mom?.."

As if in reply, a towering beast pounced upon his attackers, tearing them apart in moments. Blood splashed everywhere. Mu'hass froze watching the carnage, suddenly very afraid. Vette hid behind him.

The beast turned to face him, eyes burning red in the sockets of its golden faceplate. Fresh blood stained its golden fangs, dripping down the chin to the ground. The beast stalked towards him, and once again Mu'hass was backed against a tall piece of debris. He saw no recognition in Bestia's eyes.

He raised his lightsaber into a defensive position. His arms were shaking from exhaustion. The beast growled and raised a bloodied, clawed arm to strike at him.

"I'll... I'll hold her off. Run." He said to Vette, his voice trembling.

Bestia was drowning. All she could see was red. And yet she kept struggling, clawing her way to the surface. She always tried to regain control when the beast took over, and she always failed. And yet she never stopped trying.

Especially now that her son's life was at stake. Bestia screamed, but no sound came out. She could see a tiny window high above her. She could see Mu'hass and Vette looking up at the Dread Beast, fear and exhaustion painted across their faces. She tried to swim up towards it but no matter how hard she struggled, the window seemed farther and farther away.

And then, a hand grabbed her by the arm, and she suddenly was standing on the surface of a dark red lake. She looked over at the person who pulled her out, expecting to see Styrak or Calphayus. But instead, a tall Red Sith with the same bright orange skin and face as her own stood before her. Her hair was bright red and very curly, with a white spot in the front, and was held back by a golden band.

"Mom?"

Ha'nadi nodded slowly. Bestia hadn't seen her mother's ghost in a long, long while. She knew it was bound to the Phobis Devices, but it rarely made its appearance. Panicked, she looked over at the window. She saw Mu'hass, still intact, and still looking up at the Dread Beast, now visibly confused. Vette's expression mirrored his, and she looked from Mu'hass to the Dread Beast and back.

"I am so sorry, Bestia. I left you with the Dread Beast. You weren't ready."

Ha'nadi shook her head, the sorrow in her golden eyes replaced with resentment.

"Vitiate decided our fate for us."

"You didn't know he'd kill you. Even dad didn't know."

"We don't have a lot of time. What you're dealing with is a blessing by a Force entity called the Dread God. I received a vision from it, and created the masks in its likeness and the Phobis Devices to test myself and anyone else who wished to connect to the entity."

"Something jumped from you to me when I... found you."

Ha'nadi nodded.

"That was the Dread Beast. It was the power that the entity gave me, along with the ability to control fear."

"And then I started having these blackouts when I got really angry and the first time it happened I killed many people who didn't stand a chance against me."

Bestia looked down and rubbed her arms. At that point she was a Sith Apprentice barely out of her teens and hands already elbow deep in blood of slaves.

"How did you do it?"

"Do not run from the Dread Beast. Do not fear it."

"How can I not fear it when I can't control it and now I'm moments from tearing my own son apart?!"

"Are you afraid of the Dread Beast, or of your own anger?"

"I..."

Bestia sputtered. The question pierced her very core and she had to face it. She was afraid. Mostly of the Dread Beast, but moreso, of her own anger, that summoned it. Ever since she killed those rebelling slaves on Ziost, she forced her anger down unless she was fighting. She tried to find outlets for it. Maybe being loud and obscene and spending hours sparring with Dread Guards and Styrak vented the anger. It was not enough. The Dread Beast would come out once in a while anyway.

"I don't know." She finally admitted.

"Your rage is here to tell you you've been mistreated. Do not fear it."

Ha'nadi hugged her, and Bestia gingerly hugged her back.

"Work with your rage and with the beast. You will gain a powerful ally."

Ha'nadi let her go, and Bestia flinched when a dark mass moved into the edge of her vision. She slowly turned, and found herself face to face with the Dread Beast.

She took a deep breath, looking the beast over. She could never get a clear look at the creature before, too busy either drowning or trying to run away from it in her dreams. Its head looked like her mask, with golden wings coming from around the eyes and a tall fan crest rising in the middle. It looked less like metal and more like scales up close. It even had the same scar across the bridge of the nose as she did.

The beast studied her impassively. Bestia reached out to it. It sniffed her hand, and Bestia smiled up at it.

"I should have tried this so long ago. So much for my connection to beasts." Bestia said.
"So...do you want to be friends?"

The strike never came. Instead, the beast froze for a while. Then it shook its head, its eyes shut. When the beast's eyes opened they were no longer red, but the familiar cyan blue.

Mu'hass lowered his lightsaber slowly. His senses told him the beast wasn't a threat to him anymore, but he was still cautious nonetheless.

"Um... Mom?"

Bestia blinked, slowly getting used to the much taller form. She looked down at Mu'hass, and nodded.

"I didn't hurt you?"

"No, I'm fine."

A lightning bolt struck the huge platform at the entrance of the base and Bestia could see a winged figure descend from the roof. It hurled electricity at something below, and the opponent answered in kind.

"Vaylin. She's here." She growled. "Climb on!"

Mu'hass did as he was told, his vision obscured by the bright red mane. He reached a hand out to Vette, who shook her head.

"I think I'll pass. I'll just rest here and make my own way back."

"I'll take the lift, thanks." Rammas emerged from the shadows, a slightly shell-shocked expression on her face.

Mu'hass helped her climb up.

As Bestia started towards the base, she had to retrace part of the path she had taken to reach the small hill Mu'hass was on. As she ran, she was confronted by the destruction she had left behind. Huge Dreadseed vines climbed the walls of this gorge. Droid parts lay scattered among pools of blood and torn bodies, both Zakuulan and Alliance. More were impaled on some of the

Dreadseed vines. Farther away, an Eternal Fleet vessel lay wrapped and crushed by more vines.

Bestia leapt onto the downed ship, running along the length of it until she was level with the base's domed roof. With another powerful leap, she was on the roof. Her claws clacked on the surface of it, and she peered over the edge.

Down below, Vaylin and Styrak circled each other, their lightning bolts colliding in the middle. Horizon Guards crowded behind Vaylin, ready to pounce on Styrak any moment.

Bestia let out a loud roar, and jumped down. She landed in front of Styrak, facing Vaylin and the guards. Mu'hass rolled off her back and retreated towards the base entrance. Rammas slipped into the shadows.

Up close, Vaylin looked even more messed up. Some of the bandages on her arms were gone, leaving huge torn wounds open for all the world to see. She was hunched over, and her face was twisted into a vaguely canine shape. She clutched a tall gilded lightsaber trident, using it to stay upright, and her other hand crackled with lightning.

"Aww we're both fucked up monsters now." Vaylin said in a fake sweet voice.

Bestia didn't reply, just growled quietly.

"Guards! Kill the beast!"

The guards charged, spears and lightsabers at the ready. Bestia let out a roar, staggering the ones in front of her, and sending them flying off the platform with a swipe of her arm.

The next wave was more cautious, advancing at her with lightsaber spears pointing at her. Bestia couldn't swipe at them. She growled, looking for an opening.

A shadow slipped behind one of the guards, a gnarled vibroblade erupting from his chest. The others guards shouted, looking for whatever killed their comrade, and, in the process, taking their eyes off Bestia. Big mistake. The Dread Beast's golden teeth clamped down onto one of their heads while the other was pinned under her claws.

"She's like me." A quiet rasp came from below. Bestia looked over and saw Shyren standing there, a bloodied vibroblade in hand. Shyren stared at Vaylin in awe and horror.

"She's a Chosen of Nahut."

Bestia shook the guard in her maw from side to side, and threw him aside. The body flew past the edge of the platform.

"That would explain it." Rammas appeared next to Shyren, grabbing them by the robes and dragging them slightly out of view.

She was about to do something incredibly reckless and stupid.

"Can you help me talk her down?"

"What?"

"I'll explain later, but short story is: me and her were fucked over by the same person. Except I was taken out and raised by a loving family."

"And now you want to give her that chance?"

Rammas nodded.

"Will you help me? If she's a Chosen like you, you could help her go through the change."

"If she doesn't just kill us."

"Let's just try. If it doesn't work, we'll fight her."

Shyren sighed, then shrugged.

"Fuck it. Let's do this. At least it's a glorious way to go."

The Scion and the Sith stepped out of their hiding spot. Rammas took the lead, walking towards the center of the platform. Styrak was still holding off Vaylin. Bestia threw one last Horizon Guard off the edge of the platform, and then turned to face the Empress.

"Vaylin!" Rammas shouted.

The Empress threw one last, powerful blast at Styrak, making him stagger, and turned to face Rammas and Shyren.

"Little bird. And the beast Scion! An entire menagerie up in here tonight."

"I learned a lot on Nathema." Rammas started quietly. "I am a child of Vitiate. Made by him to be a weapon, or a backup body. Not to be a person of her own. But I got out. And I'm offering you a way out. Stand down. There are healers here who can help you."

Rammas held her hand out.

"We both were fucked over by Vitiate from birth. It doesn't have to end like this."

Vaylin looked at the offered hand for a while. And then she started laughing. It was a hollow, high-pitched sound.

"And why should I trust you? You pretended to be meek and nice, and then you ruined my party and made me relive Nathema in my head over and over again."

Rammas scratched her head.

"Fair point. I'm sorry."

Shyren opened their mouth to say something, but they, along with Rammas, were thrown back by a telekinetic blast. The Sith and the Scion regrouped in the air and skidded backwards along the floor.

"Let's try to knock her out."

Shyren faded into the shadows, and Rammas did the same. Vaylin's attention turned to Bestia and Styra. Bestia growled softly and advanced on the Empress. Vaylin slashed at her with the trident, and Bestia jumped out of the way. At the same time, Styra hurled a blast of lightning at her, actually managing to surprise her. She was blinded for a moment. Bestia pounced, and backhanded the Empress, making her drop her weapon.

The Dread Beast was about to pin Vaylin under her claws, when the Empress screamed and exploded in a massive blast of Force energy. Bestia was sent flying upwards. Styra was thrown back, and Shyren and Rammas were nearly swept off the platform, grabbing onto the edge.

She was screaming, and Rammas suddenly realised that those weren't screams of anger or defiance. They were pained wails of someone being torn apart.

Rammas climbed back onto the platform and nearly got knocked down again. She braced herself against the Force onslaught and looked around. Vaylin hovered above the floor, surrounded by a storm of lightning. Bestia lay in a heap some distance away, turned back to Sith. Styrak was slowly climbing to his feet by the wall. Cracks formed on the base facade. Everything moved painfully slowly, and someone had to do something.

An idea formed in Rammas's head. She didn't like it much, but it was the only way out that she could see. She reached inside herself, searching for the dark area within her being that has always been there. A hungering void that Rammas did her best to ignore up until now. Now she understood where it came from and understood its potential.

Rammas drew the energy around her into the void. She found herself able to stand without bracing against the waves coming from Vaylin. She started walking towards the Empress, devouring the Force that came at her. The exhaustion she felt after Nathema and the long battle slowly melted away, her Force reserves replenished.

Blood leaked from Vaylin's mouth and nose, and she didn't react to Rammas approaching her. Her eyes were wide and unfocused, and hoarse agonized wails escaped her.

Rammas sighed, balling her hand into a fist.

"I'm sorry."

Rammas punched Vaylin with as much strength as her small body had. It was enough to cause the Empress to crumple to the ground. The Force storm immediately died down. Rammas carefully drew in more energy from the unconscious Empress, until she saw Vaylin change. Her limbs and face reformed back to a human shape, although the claws and the wounds remained.

Styrak limped over, followed by Bestia. He knelt before Vaylin, checking her pulse.

"She is alive."

Shyren joined them.

"This looks much worse than my first transformation had been..."

Rammas turned to the Scion.

"Is there any way to stop her from turning again? Or stop the process at all?"

Shyren thought about it for a while, then shrugged.

"Something has been preventing it up until now."

"Not an option." Bestia said. "We are not Vitiate."

"I could cut her off from the Force." Styrak said.

Rammas shook her head.

"That would have to be her own choice."

Styrak picked Vaylin up and carried her inside the base. Rammas and Shyren followed him, leaving Bestia to her thoughts.

Bestia walked to the edge of the platform and looked out at the forested cliffs that surrounded the base. She could see a part of the path she had carved as the Dread Beast. It was a dark corrupted scar that would take a long time to heal, if that was even possible.

When Sharack managed to broker a tenuous peace between the Jedi and the Dread Masters, one of the conditions was that they'd cleanse the areas corrupted by the seeds of rage. Bestia took on the task personally, coaxing the dreadseed out of the soil. What was left behind were darkened barren blemishes. Status reports indicated that those areas were slow to heal. It was the same here, except instead of a Sith artifact that she modified it was a result of her own power.

She looked away, shame suddenly gnawing at her. She'd become a force of corruption and decay over the centuries spent as a Dread Master, trying to build up as much power as possible out of fear of Vitiate. And now there was no turning back. The Dread Seed was part of her now, and she would have to make peace with that, like she did with the Dread Beast.

Her ears twitched at the sounds of steps approaching. Uneven, interspersed with the clack of a cane hitting the metal floor. Styrak was back.

"The fleet has retreated." He said.

"That's good."

Bestia looked up and indeed, the skies were empty, no longer choked by the grid formation of the Eternal Fleet.

"Vaylin is in Oggurobb's care. Rammas and Shyren are staying with her."

He put a hand on Bestia's shoulder, and she held onto it.

"They want us in the war room. They're not happy even though we've earned them a victory."

There was a sneer in Styrak's voice. Bestia's shoulders slumped. It was time to face the music. Maybe she'd finally get some rest afterwards.

"Let's go deal with that."

One step at a time.

Bestia felt the eyes on her the moment she stepped into the War room. Styrak moved in closer, as did the other Dread Masters. Rammas and Sharack were there too. Bestia gently pushed her way to the front of the group.

She caught Theron glaring at her from across the table. The hatred in his eyes would have made any Sith jealous and proud. She sensed similar levels of hatred and distrust coming from the rest of the people gathered here, especially those who used to be part of the Republic. So much for the peace her daughter had tried to build. Lana stood out, as both the one former imperial, and one of the few people who weren't openly hostile. She kept a neutral expression and was difficult to read as always.

"Hundreds of Alliance soldiers are dead, and the holos of your rampage are spreading across the Holonet."

Theron jabbed a finger at Bestia.

"She did defeat Vaylin in the end, though." Tyrans retorted. "You're fucking welcome."

Bestia raised an arm, and Tyrans fell silent.

"Yes, I did lose control and go on a rampage. I will not deny that. I believe I've regained control so it will not happen again."

"And we're supposed to trust you."

"If we wanted harm to the Alliance, we had many opportunities to do so." Brontes said, crossing her arms. "Make of that what you will."

"Bestia has been on the forefront of almost every Alliance victory up until now." Lana said.

"The Dread Masters do not benefit from sabotaging the Alliance. We want the Eternal Fleet gone as much as you do." Tyrans said.

"They destroyed centuries of research and stole the Phobis Devices. Do I have to remind you that I had to recover an active Phobis Device from a bloody museum on Zakuul?!"

Brontes quietly fumed, her metal tentacles undulating. Koth looked at her, deep in thought.

"Wait, was this the incident with the massive panic in the upper Spire during the first year of Emperor Arcann's reign?"

Brontes huffed.

"I believe so. You're welcome."

"You have been helpful with the Gravestone upgrades..." Koth conceded. "This still doesn't undo the fact that your friend turned into a giant beast, rampaged through Odessen, and killed a lot of our people."

"No, it does not." Bestia said. "I can't bring back the dead, but I can at least deal with the Dread Seed corruption I had left behind."

"And what if you decide to rampage again?"

Another distrustful, accusatory voice. It was Aric this time. The Cathar bared his teeth at Bestia.

"I should have shot you when I had the chance."

"And you'd have the remaining Dread Masters on a rampage. Are you not aware of what happened when Styrak was torn out of the union?" Brontes locked eyes with the Cathar, and held his gaze until he looked away.

"Are you and Theron done scolding me like I'm a Tu'kata Hound who shat on the floor? I said I will do what I can to deal with the aftermath."

An edge of a growl found its way into Bestia's voice. It only had been a short while but she was sick of this. She was surprised the Dread Beast wasn't reacting to her anger. But maybe she really did find common ground with it. Or she simply was too exhausted.

She saw Sharack shift her weight from one foot to the other, an uncomfortable scowl etched into the Jedi's face. Then Sharack stepped forward, joining the Dread Masters on their side of the table.

"By the stars, this is the fucking Jedi Council all over again. Treating people like beasts and weapons. Ugh."

The two groups glared at each other from across the table in uncomfortable silence. Lana stood slightly to the side, like the neutral party she tried to be.

The standoff was interrupted by the table lighting up, a map of the galaxy with several spots pulsing red. Bestia recognised the locations: Coruscant and Dromund Kaas. There was a third location, in the same region as Odessen, that Bestia wasn't sure about.

"What's going on?" Sharack asked.

"It's the Eternal Fleet. It's bombing Zakuul, and there are distress calls coming from all over the galaxy, reporting similar news."

Chapter End Notes

Flipped bird count: 16

End Times

Chapter Summary

Valkorion and the Dread Masters travel to Zakuul to wrestle the Eternal Fleet back under control. They will find more than they bargained for.

Soft steps came from behind Bestia, and she turned around. Cael carefully pushed past her. Behind him, Shyren peeked their head into the War Room, and Heskai hovered next to them.

"Vaylin's link to the Eternal Throne has been severed. The fleet reverted to its original programming. When I found it, it was a mindless weapon of mass destruction. I, and later, Tenebrae through me, molded it into something beyond that. Although what Tenebrae wanted with it, I shudder to think."

He took off his Scion mask. Koth's eyes went wide. Aric scowled in distrust, but at least his attention was off Bestia, for now. Sharack's eyebrow spikes went about as high as they could physically go.

"Hello, Cael." Lana said. "Or, shall I say, Emperor Valkorion?"

"You've been alive this entire time?!"

Koth was this close to shaking the poor emperor by the shoulders. Then he gained control of himself, and frowned slightly.

"Why did you let Arcann and Vaylin wreck Zakuul?"

Valkorion let out a long, deep, and tired sigh. This was an expected question.

"I was recovering. From, well. It is a long story and we do not quite have the time. It will suffice to say that I have not been myself for the bulk of my reign."

"The spawn of Zildrog had our Emperor in his grasp. It was my first vision as a Chosen of Nahut."

Shyren and Heskai made their way past the Dread Masters and crowded around Valkorion. Koth blinked at them.

"Wait, Zildrog is real?"

"As are the other old gods."

"O-okay..."

"The only way to stop the Eternal Fleet is to take control of the Throne. I do not want it, but it is a burden I am willing to carry. For the sake of Zakuul, and the rest of the Galaxy."

Valkorion turned to Bestia and the Dread Masters.

"Will you help me?"

"Thought you'd never ask." Bestia smiled at him.

Bestia was exhausted, but this had to be done. She'd rest afterwards. A nice, couple days long nap. Also, this gave her an excuse to interrupt Aric and Theron yelling at her, so that was nice too. She didn't wait for the scolding to continue and was first out of the war room. Valkorion caught up with her.

"I just wanted to thank you for sparing Vaylin."

"You should thank Rammas instead. She tried talking Vaylin down, and then knocked her out. Without killing her."

The Sith in question emerged from a side hallway. Valkorion suppressed a shiver that he always got crossing paths with the short Sith.

"How is Vaylin?" He asked.

"Out cold, but alive and stable. Oggurobb says she's probably going to sleep for a couple of days."

Valkorion managed to find the courage to actually look at Rammas. The eyes still unsettled him, but he reminded himself that she was not Tenebrae.

"Thank you. For sparing her life."

"Yeah. No problem. We're pretty much siblings."

"Oh?" Valkorion inclined his head slightly.

"I'm... I was made by Vitiate."

Rammas looked down, and kicked at the dusty cave floor.

"I did find the answers on Nathema. I'm a spawn of Vitiate. Which is... a fun thing to learn about oneself on a fine Primeday afternoon."

Valkorion listened, the revelation somewhat shocking but also not really a surprise. He didn't really know what to say. The group started moving towards the Gravestone's hangar. The other Dread Masters, as well as Shyren, Heskai, and Sharack, joined the procession, the mood somewhat elevated despite the grim circumstances.

"I guess that makes me a fucking princess now." Rammas shrugged.

"If you ever feel like challenging Acina for the throne, know that you have my support." Brontes said.

"I would do it, I didn't have to rule anything afterwards. Running an empire sounds like a massive pain in the ass, and I don't want it. I just want to play hologames, do hot Sith shit, and listen to music."

"You sound like Mu'hass." It was Calphayus this time, and he chuckled.

"Yeah, well, he has the right idea. The only Empire I want is the Vibe Empire."

Calphayus chuckled at that.

"That is a good approach."

Everyone boarded the Gravestone. Bestia found a reasonably flat and out of the way surface and fell asleep immediately.

Her dreams were not peaceful.

She found herself in the throne room of Zakuul. Dead and dying littered the floor. Blood pooled beneath some. Bestia saw the other Dread Masters, Lana, Theron, Rammas, Sharack, and everyone else she'd crossed paths with among them. She walked forward, pulled by an outside force. Valkorion sat on the throne. He was slumped over, seemingly dead or unconscious. A feeling of unease went through Bestia. She ascended the steps to the throne, and slowly crept towards him. She reached out a hand.

Valkorion shot up, his own hand catching Bestia by the throat. This version of him was much stronger than his frail body would lead one to believe. Vitiate's pitch black eyes stared at Bestia.

Bestia sat up with a yelp, her power erupting from her in a small shockwave. She reined it in, looking around.

"Bad dream?" Styraak asked.

"Yeah. Could be a vision. I don't know. I don't really get visions."

Bestia rubbed the side of her head and swung her legs over the side of her makeshift bed.

"I saw the throne room of Zakuul. And then Vitiate was there."

"It could be a premonition. We will be on our guard then. It's about time he emerged once more."

"Do you think?.."

"Raptus will be there?"

Bestia nodded, and reached out through the Force bond that connected her to the other Dread Masters in an intricate web. She could sense all of them, even the newly inducted Rammas, although her presence tended to blend into the background. All of them, except Raptus. Even though she and Raptus were friends once, she never had a particularly strong Force bond with him. And over the centuries, their relationship had grown sour. None of the Dread Masters were particularly close to Raptus, but to sense the links just going into nothing was odd. It was like Raptus didn't exist. And yet it was far different from the bleeding and frayed edges Styraak had left when he was struck down on Darvannis. Bestia gently poked at the restored bond. It felt scarred, like Styraak himself, but it was as strong as it had ever been.

In reality, she got up from the bed and went over to Styraak, wrapping her arms around him and burying her face in his chest. Styraak embraced her in turn.

"I love you so much." Bestia mumbled into his shoulder.

"I love you back." He responded.

The Gravestone was still in hyperspace when Bestia and Styrak entered the bridge. Valkorion stood at the helm, flanked by Heskai and Shyren, with Koth in the pilot's seat. Since Bestia saw him last, he had changed into a set of regal white robes. They were much simpler than the elaborate attire he had worn as the Eternal Emperor, and Bestia bet, much kinder to his old body. A long cape, split in the middle, hung off his shoulders, gleaming in the dim light. It was white and silver, and embroidered to look like a pair of wings.

Bestia made her way to the front of the considerable crowd gathered in the room, earning another glare from Theron. She and Styrak stood by Valkorion's side.

Calphayus joined them. He was unmasked, unlike the other Dread Masters, and there was an uneasy expression on his face.

"You had a vision?" Bestia asked.

"We are approaching the black hole I saw all these years ago. It looms before us, and it is all I can see."

"I had a dream about Vitiate."

"We are hurtling into the void. I am afraid."

"Well, let's hope we make it out."

Calphayus looked at her, his nebulous eyes full of sorrow. He seemed on the verge of tears.

"Please know that I am proud of you. I have always been proud of you."

Bestia hugged him.

"I see it too." Heskai said gravely.

Shyren reached for his hand and he let them hold it. His other arm came around Valkorion protectively. Valkorion leaned into the half-embrace slightly.

"I will... defy fate, if need be." Heskai said. "For you."

Valkorion squeezed Heskai's hand.

The blue pulsing of hyperspace slowed, replaced by lines that then turned into stars. The Eternal Fleet blocked their way. The familiar three dimensional grid spread as far as the eye could see between the small Alliance fleet and Zakuul.

The Gravestone fired its main cannon, punching a hole right through the wall of ships. Its shields held up, all the time Koth had spent fixing and upgrading the ship with the help of Scorpio and Brontes had finally paid off. The shields held against the assault as the Gravestone floated through the hole it had created.

Bestia could see the spire that housed the Eternal Throne below them. A group of Eternal Fleet vessels surrounded it, encasing it in an energy shield. Valkorion frowned, looking at it.

"We will have to access the throne from the ground level." He finally said. "It is how I had done it."

They descended to the surface in escape pods, separated into several groups. Splitting up was not ideal, but it was the only way.

The pod that held Valkorion, Bestia, Styra, Calphayus, and Rammas, landed in what must have been a magnificent garden at one point. Valkorion stopped at the pod exit, silhouetted against the burning skies. His shoulders sagged as he watched the garden burn.

"Would you believe me if I told you this was the most beautiful garden on Zakuul?" Valkorion asked mournfully. "Now look at it..."

"I will help you restore it." Calphayus said. He said it mostly to convince himself that there was hope beyond the black hole that encompassed his senses. A small promise to hold on to.

Bestia smiled, despite sharing the feeling of foreboding.

"Calphayus is great at gardening."

She followed Valkorion out, looking for the others. She saw a ball of lightning fly upward in the distance and hit a flying skytrooper, sending it spiraling.

She tapped an ear comm.

"Proceed to the palace entrance."

The other groups responded, all affirmative.

All groups converged before the entrance to the Emperor's palace. A large contingent of knights, skytroopers, and walkers stood between them and their goal.

Valkorion sighed and stepped forward, his companions parting to let him through. He looked small against the dark entrance.

"Knights!" He called out. "Stand down. I have returned to reclaim my throne."

The knights exchanged glances, some faltering and lowering their weapons. Bestia watched them, eyes narrowed, ready to fight if need be.

"Our Emperor is dead!" One of the knights cried out. "How do we know you're not some pretender? You ally yourself with the outlanders!"

Bestia heard Heskai growl and jerk forward, but Shyren held him back.

"You do not. And I can only prove that I am, in fact, me, if you let me through. I can stop the Fleet."

The Knight glared at Valkorion through the slits of his helmet. A few others lowered their weapons, stepping aside. The stubborn knight charged forward, but the sweep of his lightsaber was stopped by a Force shield Valkorion summoned around himself. He Force-pushed the knight backwards.

"I do not wish to fight my own people!"

One of the walkers charged its weapons. There was a screech, and a flash as something impacted it and sent it reeling into the other, both collapsing, burying the stubborn knight underneath them. Their drivers scrambled out and ran off.

"What now?" Bestia muttered.

People emerged from the trees to the side of the road. Bestia recognised the spindly man leading them, swaying under the weight of a rocket launcher. The entire group stopped the moment their eyes fell on Valkorion. Indo dropped the rocket launcher, and went on one knee.

"My emperor!"

"Please, there is no need..."

Bestia and the rest of the group caught up with Valkorion.

"Hey Indo. Glad you found some spine." Bestia said.

"You must be the rebels who stood against my children." Valkorion said. His shoulders lowered, as the weight of guilt settled onto them.

"If all goes well, there will be no need for rebellion."

"Will we be punished?"

"No. Of course not. But I will need assistance in rebuilding Zakuul. Will you join me?"

"Of course, my emperor!"

"In the meantime, please find shelter."

Indo nodded, bowed deeply, and jogged off, the rebels following him. Valkorion watched them go.

"What have I allowed Zakuul to descend into?" He said mournfully.

Heskal and Shyren were by his side, arms wrapped around him.

"It wasn't really you. It was Vitiate." Bestia said.

"I know it was not strictly my doing. But I let him in. I did not fight hard enough."

"I'm sure you fought as hard as you could."

"And I will see to it that Zakuul is healed."

"And then see to it that you get a well deserved rest." Bestia said.

"I will make sure he does." Heskal said.

Valkorion sighed, gripping one of Heskal's hands.

"Thank you, starlight."

The group turned to face the gates of Valkorion's palace. The entrance yawned like a cavernous maw, the lights inside flickering.

"Let's finish this." Bestia said.

She took the lead and marched through the gates. The rest followed, and the din of battle outside dulled as soon as they entered the grand foyer. A chandelier lay shattered on the floor, and the walls had burn marks on them. A set of wide stairs led to an upper level, with a series of elevators set into the far wall.

Bestia's ears twitched as metal steps thudded from upstairs. Getting through wouldn't be that easy. Not waiting for the enemy to gain the high ground, Bestia darted up the stairs, Tyrans and Shyren in tow. The three cut and tore through the skytroopers.

Valkorion followed them, and this time, the few Knights they had encountered stood down and turned on the Skytroopers. Valkorion ordered the Knights to guard the elevators as the group boarded the central one.

They rode in complete silence, level after level rushing past the foggy glass doors.

A bad feeling coiled deep inside Bestia. She saw Calphayus stare ahead, tension flowing from him in waves. Heskai had a similar worried look about him. The two seers sensed something too. Likely the odd horizon that Calphayus and the Scions couldn't see past.

The elevator dinged. Valkorion, Heskai and Calphayus flinched visibly.

The throne room was as Bestia remembered it, save for the few skytroopers strewn about in pieces. The knights stationed here formed in two rows along the sides of the walkway. They were battered, and yet they stood tall. Valkorion nodded to them as he passed.

He stopped at the base of the stairs, looking up.

"My throne. My prison." Valkorion said softly.

Squaring his thin shoulders, he ascended the gilded steps that led towards the Eternal Throne. His feet felt heavy, and a feeling of dreadful premonition nested in his chest. The Throne. The only way to stop the madness outside. The place where his free will was taken from him centuries ago. The place where it was returned to him, at the cost of nearly dying. He raised a hand to his chest, where a star-shaped burn scar marked the spot where Sharack had stabbed him. Its sibling marked his back, breaking the black chain Tenebrae had inked onto his spine.

He didn't want to rule, not anymore. With Tenebrae's influence gone, he felt age catching up to him. Deep down he knew that he would eventually die, and wanted to spend his remaining years with Heskai and Shyren, away from politics and the throne. But he also knew that it was his duty to stop the Eternal Fleet and see to it that Zakuul and the rest of the Galaxy started healing.

Valkorion turned around, standing in front of the throne. His allies gathered around the base, looking up at him. Bestia was grinning. Heskai and Shyren stared at him with love and pride. Sharack gave him a sheepish thumbs up.

Valkorion let out a heavy sigh, and lowered himself onto the throne, the sensors in the armrests blinking and beeping faintly.

And then, time stopped.

Valkorion couldn't move.

A shadow slithered up the throne steps, weaving between the Dread Masters and Scions. It rose as it ascended, resolving into a slender Red Sith with floor-length hair as black as a heart of a black hole, and cold black eyes to match.

Valkorion struggled against his sudden paralysis to no avail. Once again, he could only watch. Tenebrae covered the distance between them. Valkorion managed to turn away, but even that small act of rebellion was undone. Tenebrae reached for him, clawed hand as cold as the vacuum of space taking a hold of his jaw. He was forced to face Tenebrae.

"You thought you could escape me, my dear Valkorion?"

Valkorion let out a choked scream. Everything went black.

Bestia saw Valkorion go stiff as a board, and then he exploded in a whirlwind of darkness. She ran up the steps with a roar, only to be immediately drained of all strength.

"Valkorion!" Heskai cried out. He struggled against Shyren dragging him away from the lashing tendrils of darkness.

Before the two of them, the Dread Masters collapsed one after another until the only one standing of the group was Sharack, holding an unconscious Brontes in her arms and snarling in the direction of the throne.

She gently set the Dread Master on the floor, and flew towards Valkorion, a mirror of her actions over five years ago. Except this time, a void-black tendril emerged from Valkorion and impaled the Undying, leaving her crumpled on the floor like the others.

Shyren looked at Heskai, then at Valkorion.

"It's the spawn of Zildrog." They rasped, shuddering. "He's back."

Heskai made a move towards the throne. Shyren grabbed him by the arm, and shook their head. After ensuring Heskai wasn't going to do anything, they cautiously made their way to the nearest Dread Master.

"Alive."

The Scion retreated back to where Heskai stood shaking, hands curled into fists. Shyren headbutted his shoulder gently, trying to comfort him.

"What...what do we do?" He finally asked no one in particular. He couldn't see into the future. His vision was obscured by the same anomaly Calphayus saw. And from what he and Shyren had overheard, other Scions saw it too.

Behind him, the elevator doors opened, revealing a group of skytroopers.

"We protect them." Shyren said.

Styrak blinked. He was lying on his back on what felt like sand. Pitch black sky completely devoid of stars stretched above him. He climbed to his feet, leaning on his cane, and looked around.

Amber sand on half buried tiles. A carved Sith throne decorated with bones. A lonely palm tree sitting on a floating rock. He immediately recognised where Vitiate had flung him.

Darvannis. Or a simulacrum of it.

A lightsaber slammed into his back, and Styrak screamed in pain. He spun around, but no one was there.

His entire right half exploded in searing agony, and all he saw was fire.

This wasn't real. This wasn't real!

And yet the pain of weapons piercing and burning him, leaving behind the wounds that became the scars that he saw in the mirror every bloody day felt very real.

Styrak screamed.

Bestia coughed as she came to, nearly drowning, arms splashing about. Everything was red. She floated in an endless ocean of blood.

She spun around, but everywhere was the same.

It rained, and the rain was red too.

"Seriously? I've had this nightmare hundreds of times." She called out to the empty, dark red sky.

In the nightmares she always drowned. This time there was a gravity to that knowledge. A gut feeling that if she drowned this time, she would never wake up. And Vitiate would win.

This time, however, she had the knowledge that the Dread Beast wasn't her enemy. Struggling against the sticky, metallic waves, Bestia called on the Dread Beast. Shadows wrapped around her, and new strength filled her body.

And suddenly, the pool of blood was shallow enough for Bestia to stand in. She looked around, unimpeded by the waves that receded rapidly until she was standing on something in complete darkness.

She jumped up and brought the Dread Beast's full weight onto the floor, intent on breaking through it.

Rammas stood in a city street. Ashes blew in the wind, and a dessicated body lay at her feet. She could see others, frozen forever in their final moments.

She carefully walked around the body, moving cautiously down the street. She didn't recognize the bodies, or the environment, although it looked somewhat like Dromund Kaas. Which wasn't much help, because most imperial cities looked about the same, and without any other identifiers it could be anything. Her mind wandered to Ziost.

She wondered if that's where she was.

There was movement in the corner of her eye. She slowly turned around. A shadow stood there, indistinct but humanoid in shape. Rammas's hand went for her lightsaber, and her mind started calculating escape routes.

The shadow started moving towards her, gliding over the ashen pavement. Rammas stepped away, and saw other shadows emerge from side streets. Suddenly, her surroundings were filled with faceless figures, converging around her.

They didn't make any moves to attack, simply surrounding her.

They didn't need to.

A wave of anguish and sorrow crashed into Rammas's mind. She hastily threw up mental shields. The shadows all pointed fingers at her in unison, and started wailing.

Rammas covered her ears, doubling over. The screams seemed to be in her head.

They all were accusing her of their death.

Rammas's eyes darted around, looking for a way out, and finding none. That is, until she looked up. There were no shadows above her.

She jumped, scrambling up the wall, using the smallest of handholds to her advantage. Ghostly hands lashed out at her from the windows as she passed. One grabbed her coattails, nearly sending her crashing down to her death. Rammas kicked at it, her foot connecting with a spot of deathly cold.

She couldn't keep climbing forever. The building had a top level, and then what? She couldn't keep running forever.

She looked around, and found that the city had an eerie, glitched quality to it some distance away. The buildings looked flat and copy pasted.

This wasn't real.

Vitiate put her in a mindscape equivalent of a hologame level.

She just had to figure out how to either clear it, or find some sort of exploit. She chuckled at the idea of having to T-pose in some hyper specific spot to break the mindscape. It wouldn't be that easy.

She climbed up a few more stories, her limbs feeling heavy. No shadows seemed to follow her this high up, and she cut a hole in a window and climbed in. She needed to regroup and think.

She crouched down on the floor, out of view, and put her mind to reconstructing the sequence of events that led her here. She was in the throne room with Valkorion. Then darkness started spewing out of him, running those who stood near through. Then she blacked out and woke up here.

Then she realized this place wasn't real. Conclusion: her creator placed her in this scenario to break her. Which was similar to what the Phobis Device did: it conjured a mindscape populated by a person's own fears, magnified.

Realizing the unreality was part of the solution.

What was the scenario Vitiate wanted to break her with?

Rammas reflected on the past few days, and the fear that had chased her for a long, long time. She feared that she held some kind of horrible power (she seemed to), and once she'd learned of her origin, she feared becoming like the one she shared that power with: Vitiate.

This was the scenario Vitiate put her in. The ghosts accused her of devouring their planet.

Which Rammas knew she didn't do.

This could be a vision of the future.

Rammas shook her head, creeping into the apartment she'd invaded. It was empty, like an area of a game not quite meant to be accessed.

And yet.

A mirror sat on the far wall, standing out in the empty surroundings.

Rammas walked up to it, and brushed the dust off its surface. She wished she didn't.

Her reflection wore red and gold robes, and had long hair trailing on the floor. Rammas flinched, but instead of fear a quiet, cold anger filled her. She sighed, and flipped off her reflection. The reflection did the same in return, which, given its regal attire, drew a tired chuckle from Rammas.

"I'm not you. I will never be you. You're a few days late with showing me this, *father*."

The mirror cracked, and light spilled out of the gaps, swallowing Rammas.

Calphayus floated in the dark. He was afraid.

The darkness mocked him, and showed him visions of his family struggling against their worst fears and memories.

It was like being subjected to the Phobis Device, all over again. Except the Phobis Devices were impartial. They were machines. They simply drew on what was already there, bathing the user in dark side energy. You just had to survive and learn to navigate its tides.

What Calphayus was subjected to now was driven by active malice and hatred. Towards him and Bestia specifically.

He saw Bestia floating in an ocean of blood. He could sense echoes of her fear, but he could also sense tired, dogged determination behind her.

He witnessed Styrak being attacked by an army of ghosts. He was overwhelmed, screaming in pain.

Calphayus heard another scream, coming from somewhere to the side. He turned around. A small golden star floated there, trapped in a tangle of black tendrils. Its light was dimming.

Calphayus floated towards the light. He couldn't really see, his physical eyes blind. His Force Sight was nearly useless as well, he realized. The darkness was the black hole he saw all these years ago. He was inside it.

Something wrapped around him, forcing him to his knees.

"You will watch your worst vision come true, little wretch."

Tyrans stood amid a labyrinth of mirrors. Before that, there was a board game of a kind he normally cracked easily. But this time, each one of his stratagems was met with lightning coursing through his body. He was punished for thinking creatively. And then he blacked out and woke up here.

Everywhere he looked, a face that was and wasn't his stared back, completely ignoring the fact he'd been wearing his mask still. At first he thought it was Brontes. But then, an old, long buried memory was wrested from the depths, and Tyrans snarled.

His past stared back at him. The past life and body he had shucked away because it wasn't him. It was never him, it just took him a while to realize it. Tyrans gritted his teeth and the reflection repeated the movement.

"Motherfucker." He growled in the deepest voice his throat implant would allow, before punching the mirror as hard as he could.

"She is dead." He said as the shards cascaded to the void-black floor. "And you are next."

Light spilled from the broken mirror, the cracks expanding to the floor. It crumbled, and Tyrans fell.

Brontes flinched as she came awake, seated in an uncomfortable throne inside... wait, where was she? She looked around, the internal HUD of her eyes flashing with names and designations. Her mechanical tendrils twitched in momentary agitation before she pushed the panic down.

She was inside a large dimly lit chamber. The green upside down pyramid light gave everything a sickly tint. A platform sat suspended above the floor, and several thrones surrounded it, including her own. People dressed in red robes and golden masks occupied the thrones. Two of the thrones were empty, their occupants standing on the central platform side by side. They looked distinctly worn out.

The HUD flashed with names Brontes didn't recognize, even though deep down she knew she should have. She raised her hands to her face, hidden behind a mask of her own.

Logic dictated she had to be part of the gathering, part of those Dread Masters, whatever they were.

One of the people on the platform, a muscular tall woman with orange skin and a sleeveless robe, stepped forward, arguing with one of the seated figures. Her voice was laced with grief. Brontes felt like the grief was her own, but she failed to pinpoint its source.

Until her eyes fell upon the tattered blue cloak the woman was holding. Its color stood out much more than it should have. Something broke through the fog that clouded Brontes's brain. A faint memory of a tall strong figure smiling down at her. A larger than life personality. The awe this person held in her eyes when she looked at Brontes.

Her name was Sharack, and she had been in love with Brontes, and she was gone.

The memory of the grief broke the dam, and after Sharack, Brontes remembered Bestia, Styrak, Tyrans, and the others.

Grief replaced by anger at the realization of what was going on.

Vitiate was trying to prey on her fear of oblivion.

Brontes stood up from the throne, metal tendrils lashing about in anger.

She stared up at the ceiling.

"You failed, Vitiate. Your visions are a pitiful imitation of the Phobis Devices. You defile Lord Ha'nadi's work with your attempts to break us."

The other Dread Masters in the memory crumbled to dust, as did the council chamber.

Brontes blazed through the darkness, determined to find the others.

Sharack had no control over her body. Over and over her lightsaber cleaved through armies of... the empire? The Republic? Zakuul? Dread Guard? She couldn't tell. The people she killed kept shifting and changing, and her surroundings were a feverish amalgamation of different planets. A disembodied Oricon lavafall plunged into a gilded street of Zakuul that halfway through was cut through by a grim Imperial skyscraper tilted at an angle that was unsustainable.

The pile of ever-changing bodies grew higher. Something forced Sharack to spread her wings and move forward. This time she ended up in what looked like the plaza before the Senate building on Coruscant, although everything was tilted and the light was too red.

Three Jedi blocked her path. An older human stood in front, double bladed lightsaber ignited, and grim determination in her blue eyes. Her graying black hair was braided, and her robes looked worn. A younger human girl with red hair and a small scar on her cheek flanked her to one side. She looked at Sharack with fear and hurt. The third was a Cathar woman with orange fur and gentle, sorrow-filled green eyes.

Sharack wailed and strained against the invisible strings that piloted her as she recognised the three: Satele Shan, grandmaster of the Jedi Order, Kira, Sharack's former Padawan, and No'ree, Sharack's adoptive mother. Resistance was futile, and Sharack advanced against her will, inhuman wails falling from her mouth. She lifted her lightsaber, ready to cleave the Jedi in half.

A fourth figure landed before her, one that didn't belong. She wore red robes and a golden mask, and had four mechanical tentacles coming from her back.

She extended a hand towards Sharack.

"Let me help you." A familiar deep voice cut through the haze, and Sharack found new strength to resist.

Brontes's presence was enough. Sharack roared, thrashing against the invisible strings, and felt them rip one by one. She collapsed to her knees, and Brontes was there, arms and tentacles wrapped around her. Sharack buried her face in Brontes's chest, crying for probably the first time since she came back from the dead.

"I couldn't control anything..." Sharack sobbed.

"Fucking Vitiate."

"He made me forget everything." Brontes said. She stroked Sharack's hair gently. "You made me remember."

Sharack looked up at her, and wiped her eyes.

"I was... in a memory of the last Dread council meeting. When Bestia tried to rally us."

"Oh."

"I recognized your cloak. It was enough to break the illusion."

Sharack stood up, and smiled down at Brontes.

"I love you too. Let's go kick some Vitiate ass."

Styrak lay curled up on the ground. He was in so much pain he couldn't even scream anymore. All around him he saw fire and the ghosts of his killers.

He was losing the fight against Vitiate's illusions. Or against his own mind. Either way, he was failing, and deep down he knew that he wouldn't wake up.

His thoughts went to Bestia. He didn't want to leave her behind again. He struggled, slowly lifting himself off the ground. His wings unfurled into being, batting away the shadows that tormented him with ghostly weapons.

He felt so *weak*.

And then he saw the Dread Beast leap through the flames surrounding him and maul some of the ghosts. Was this part of Vitiate's plan? To finish Styrak off using the image of his wife? He certainly wouldn't put it past Vitiate.

Styrak collapsed back onto the sand, and watched the Dread Beast take care of his attackers. Once done, Bestia stalked over to him. He stared up at her, wanting to at least meet his death with dignity.

"Finish this." He rasped, voice completely gone.

Bestia shook her head and shifted into her usual form. She carefully helped Styrak up.

"Are you okay?"

"Not really."

"Vitiate will pay for this."

The scene around them started withering away into nothing.

Rammas shot up. She was no longer in the vision her creator constructed for her. However, she was certain she was still within the mindscape.

Something felt off. She looked around and flinched when she saw herself, stirring weakly a few steps away. Her body sat up. Her eyes locked with the eyes of the other Rammas.

"WHO ARE YOU AND WHY DO YOU LOOK LIKE ME?!" The Other Rammas yelled. There was something oddly imperious about the tone of her voice.

"Ugh, same?" Rammas flinched again when the voice that came out of her wasn't her own. It was very deep and sounded old.

"What the fuck." She whispered as she looked down at the white robes and old human hands. She lifted the hands to examine the face and there was short hair and a fluffy beard.

"What in the motherfuck." She said, louder this time. Expletives sounded comical uttered in the regal voice. "Why am I an old guy?"

"Yes, why are you in my body, child of Tenebrae?"

"Why are you in mine?!"

"Is this why I am so short?"

The person piloting her body stood up. Rammas did the same, wincing at the menagerie of faint pains that traveled over the body she now inhabited.

"This body isn't much taller, *your majesty*. "

Valkorion huffed.

"Give me my body back, child of Tenebrae."

"Dude. I didn't take it! Don't get me wrong." Rammas pointed finger guns at him, which was even more comical than the expletives. "You're *fine*, but I'd rather be in my own body. I'm not even going to argue about the "child of Tenebrae" thing. Just know I'm not on his side, and this wasn't my doing."

Valkorion facepalmed, and let out a tired sigh. Coming from Rammas's small frame, it was as out of place as Rammas's own mannerisms were, translated into Valkorion's body.

"I... apologize. Let us try again?"

"Yeah. I'm just. It seems like everyone just assumes I'm evil."

"Tenebrae would want us at each other's throats."

"Yep. Let's show him he's a scrub."

Valkorion nodded.

"What do we do, then?" He asked.

Rammas looked around.

"There's a path! I think if we follow it, and successfully complete whatever scenario Vitiate put us in, we'll be swapped back. It's kinda how mindscapes work in my experience. They're like a hologame level in a way."

Rammas started down the path, Valkorion following her. The path meandered around twisted monuments and floating stones. Dark dust was frozen in the air, stuck in the middle of being blown away. Ghosts of people flickered in and out of reality as the two walked.

"And you have a lot of experience with mindscapes?"

"More with hologames. But I've had to deal with a Phobis Device once. They do something similar. Put you against your worst fears cranked up to eleven."

"I see."

An awkward silence fell between them. The landscape was barren as they slowly approached the edge of the floating island.

"Sure is empty here." Rammas walked over to the edge and peered down. "Hey there, Force demons! It's me, ya boi!"

Using Valkorion's distinctly regal and fancy voice to yell stupid things was a temptation Rammas could not resist. She shouted a string of expletives into the void for a good measure.

A hand grabbed the back of the white robes and dragged her away from the edge.

"Can you not? Is this truly a game to you?"

Rammas shrugged.

"No, but also, yes?" Valkorion groaned at her. "Again this is basically a hologame level made out of our memories and fears and shit. Also maybe if I yell really loud that Vitiate can come and eat my entire..."

There was a rumbling behind her, and she turned to face the abyss. A bridge of cracked obsidian, looking distinctly like something she had seen on Oricon, appeared before them. It led to a platform floating in the void.

"See?"

Valkorion just sighed, and the two cautiously made their way along the bridge.

The platform was roughly round, with a broken staircase leading downwards in the center, and a series of crumbled bridges going away from it like spokes on a wheel.

Rammas tried the staircase, but this time, nothing happened.

"Blocked. I think it wants us to do something before we can go there."

"I think it wants us to explore the other bridges first." Valkorion said. "At least that is a gut feeling I have."

Rammas joined him as they cautiously approached one of the rocky stubs. Like the last time, a bridge formed, allowing them passage to a small island that floated some distance away from the platform.

A mote of light floated above the barren chunk of rock. When Valkorion approached it, it flashed, and unfurled into a scene frozen in time.

A night-time swamp lit by bioluminescent fungi and fireflies. A small village sat nestled beneath a cluster of massive mangroves. A wall surrounded it. The scene focused on the commotion at the gate. Two people were in the process of throwing a third out.

Rammas walked around the scene cautiously, Valkorion following her. She circled the man, frozen midair.

He was thin and wiry, but looked strong somehow. He had long black hair and a beard, and Rammas suddenly recognized the younger version of the face she currently wore thanks to Vitiate.

"It's you."

The voice came from nowhere and everywhere at once. Deep and gravelly, laced with disdain and smugness.

"You were exiled for daring to go against the old ways."

Rammas and Valkorion spun around, looking for the source. They found none.

Valkorion sighed.

"He is showing us my memories. I could live without reliving those, especially with someone I barely know."

"That's fair. I'd rather be back in my body."

"That, too."

Valkorion was drawn to the mote of light at the center of the scene. He reached for it, and it was absorbed into him. Something rumbled behind them.

"I could look away if you want."

"Well, unless Tenebrae decides to surprise us with, say, a memory of the night one of the children were conceived, there is no need."

Even speaking in rammas's voice, Valkorion sounded dignified. He also exuded an air of being completely fucking done with this bullshit. A feeling that Rammas shared.

"Yeah, let's hope he doesn't Do That."

They returned back to the platform. Lo and behold: a section of the staircase had been restored.

Another bridge led to another island with another mote of light.

This one depicted a different scene. It was evening this time, and the location was a clearing under the roots of yet another mangrove, this one growing next to a cliff. A small hut sat by the rock wall. Younger Valkorion sat by a campfire in front of it, poking at the twigs and branches. He was dirty and haggard, his clothes tattered.

A hooded figure walked out of the darkness, almost gliding towards the fire until it stood before Valkorion. It lowered the hood, and before them stood Vitiate.

"You survived alone in the woods, but the burden of solitude was insurmountable."

"Shut up." Valkorion snarled. "I should not have listened to you."

Rammas said nothing.

"If I knew where it would lead, I would have rather stayed in exile. Dying alone would have been preferable to the violation you have subjected me to."

Rammas elected to stay silent on the trip back and across the third bridge. She had an inkling that her presence was a glitch, caused by her breaking the scenario Vitiate cooked up for her. She hoped that if she assisted Valkorion, they'd both get their bodies swapped back, and, more importantly, survive.

The third memory was one of Valkorion walking through the woods. He was frozen mid stride, with a determined expression etched into his face. He wasn't alone this time. Three people followed him. Right behind him walked a tall brawny man. He wore ramshackle armor and carried a spear. Behind him was another person, with dark shaggy hair and a hunched posture whose gender was unclear. They wore layers of wrapped cloth, decorated with many amulets. And behind them, glided the familiar figure of Vitiate, hooded once again.

"You have gathered the few who listened, and together we set out on the journey. The journey to claim the power of the gods for the people of Zakuul."

"No. We didn't claim power. The gods gave it freely, in gratitude."

"Gratitude for what?" Rammas asked.

"They were bound, forced to run programs that set them against the people of Zakuul."

"I was exiled because I learned of that. People refused to believe what I saw."

The fourth vision depicted Valkorion and his companions standing before a gigantic silver dragon. It bowed its head towards Valkorion, and golden energy was flowing from it to him. The first of the companions now bore a lightsaber spear, and was dressed in armor that looked somewhat like Zakuul knights. The other companion carried two gnarled swords: one red and one blue. Rammas recognised the swords. Shyren carried one that looked exactly like them. Shyren claimed the sword had once belonged to the founder of the Scion order. Vitiate lurked on the very edge of the scene.

"With my help, you freed the gods, and in return, they granted you and your companions their gifts. Long life. Powers in the Force. Technology."

The next memory depicted Valkorion and the hooded figure overseeing a massive building effort. Beginnings of a wall encircled a huge area, where buildings were slowly raised.

"The gods granted us vision and resources to transform this backwards world."

"Zakuul was an experiment to you, wasn't it? And so was I."

Valkorion sounded mournful, and the words took an additional meaning coming from the mouth of Vitiate's own creation. He and Rammas had more in common than either of them suspected.

The staircase was almost restored. There was one more memory left. Valkorion hesitated before stepping onto the last bridge, as if he knew what that memory would be. Rammas followed, a silent ghost wearing an old man's face.

The final memory took place in the throne room. Valkorion sat on the throne. He looked like the depictions Rammas had seen during her stay on Zakuul, but younger. His hair and beard were trimmed neatly, and he wore the familiar armor.

Valkorion froze, unable to tear his eyes away from the sight. He was shaking, and Rammas felt an urge to hug him.

His past self's eyes were wide with the purest distilled terror Rammas had ever seen. Shadowy hands were holding him down as dark energy shoved itself into his chest.

Rammas moved to stand by Valkorion's side, unsure of what to do. She felt fear and pain rolling off of him.

"I'm so sorry." She finally said.

She didn't know Valkorion that well, or at all, but seeing those memories made her blood boil. Her feelings coalesced into quiet, cold hatred. The kind she felt briefly for the bullies back on Korriban. The kind that drove her to make them disappear. What was Vitiate if not another bully, except on a galactic scale? And what was Rammas if not good at making bullies mysteriously vanish?

She hugged Valkorion, but also herself. He let her.

And suddenly their perspective shifted, and Rammas found herself back in her own body. She squeezed Valkorion gently. To her surprise, he let her do that as well.

They let each other go after a few moments, Valkorion blinking and confused, slightly disoriented by the shift in perspective.

"Looks like we're back to normal." Rammas said.

"That is good, at least."

"Let's go make Vitiate disappear."

They returned to the central platform and descended down the stairs. They led to another island, large and roughly round, suspended over what looked like a black hole.

A warped platform sat in the back of the island, with stone steps leading up to a copy of the eternal throne.

Rammas saw others approaching the island from different angles. Styrak was leaning onto Bestia. Sharack and Brontes zipped out of the seemingly empty space and landed next to Rammas, as did Tyrans, who looked royally pissed off.

"I see everyone managed to kick their respective visions to the curb." Bestia said.

"More or less. Brontes helped." Sharack said.

"Where's Calphayus, though?" Rammas asked.

"I think I have an inkling of where he may be..." Valkorion said, stepping towards the throne.

Bestia joined him at the head of the group as they approached the raised platform and climbed the stairs.

Vitiate sat on the throne, his unnatural void-black hair spilled across the floor like twisted tree roots. And here was Calphayus, kneeling and bound in dark tendrils at his feet. Tears streamed down his face.

Bestia growled, and pulled Dramath's holocron out of her pocket, stomping up to the throne. The device glowed an angry red, and Vitiate twitched violently before he could say anything.

The bindings holding Calphayus dissolved and he scrambled away, Sharack helping him up.

"It...won't work." He managed to say.

And all hell broke loose.

Vitiate scowled, overpowering the holocron's hold on him. He stood up and reached out, his movements stilted. Still, the holocron was torn out from Bestia's grasp, and with a clench of a fist, it shattered.

Vitiate let out a wave of darkness that sent everyone flying.

Bestia turned into the Dread Beast midair, and leapt back at Vitiate, pummeling the dark bubble around him. She was joined by the others.

Styrak aimed a blast of dark energy at him, but before he could let it fly, a dark tendril smacked him away.

"Recruit a hundred Dread Masters! Gather up a thousand holocrons! An arsenal of superweapons! Nothing can stop me!"

Shyren, Heskai, and the knights formed a half-circle around the throne. Wave after wave of skytroopers came at them, and the glowing shield still blocked the spire from the rest of Zakuul.

Heskai's eyes glowed white as he directed healing into the knights and Shyren, and they could swear they saw a faint shimmer at his back shaped like wings. Reinvigorated, shyren cut down another skytrooper with their vibrosword, and then rammed their talons into the wiring of another, tearing it out. By their side, a large knight threw a downed skytrooper's body into a gathering of its kin.

Down below, the alliance forces fought to clean up the palace grounds. Oramis and her Scions were a storm of Force powers, directing those around them, healing, and raining debris on the enemy.

The Alliance forces fought by their side, led by Lana Beniko. They were a motley crew of Republic, Imperial, and masked Dread Guard working together.

Oramis wondered how long this arrangement would last after the battle was over. How many would retain the bonds forged in the Eternal Alliance? How much of a joke that name would prove to be?

A shot zipping past her head and nearly singing her afro pulled Oramis back to reality. A large gilded elite skytrooper made its way to this group of Scions. Oramis gripped her lightsaber tighter.

Calphayus slumped to his hands and knees. Right beneath him, he could see all timelines converging to one point: Vitiate. There was seemingly nothing beyond, the bright glowing threads sucked into a Black hole and gone for good. Calphayus pondered the revelation for a few moments. This was the point he saw all these years back. The point beyond which he couldn't see. And here he was, way past its event horizon.

"Give up, and be devoured. Like your wife was. Like you should have back then. Like everything will be."

Silence. This was the absolute worst thing to say at this specific moment. A rage unlike anything he had ever felt rose within Calphayus. Before him stood the man who took everything from him, and turned him into a monster. The man who time and time again tried to take his child away from him, and twist her into nothing more than a hollow vessel. The man directly responsible for the destruction of his home planet, and indirectly responsible for their exile from Oricon. And Calphayus could do nothing. Or could he?

"No. There is always choice."

Calphayus slammed a fist into the ground, into the black hole at the center of a galaxy of glimmering timelines. It shattered, the black suddenly interrupted by a spider web of colorful cracks.

Calphayus slowly climbed to his feet, and lifted his arms. He reached into the Force, and through it, into every alternate timeline he could, searching for a kindred soul in each: himself. Or, well, a version of himself.

Groups of figures appeared around and behind him. Mostly in groups of six, although there were single figures here and there. Most dressed in the same red robes and gold masks, with the few lonely figures dressed in simple brown robes. Bestia watched, mouth agape. She and the others recognized the golden crests. Those were the Dread Masters from alternate timelines. Bestia saw a myriad of different faces among those who chose to not wear their masks. Mostly Red Sith and human, but there was an odd Cathar, Rattataki, and some others that Bestia couldn't recognize at the moment.

A thousand Dread Masters it is, then.

"I, and all of the Dread Masters from every timeline I could reach, will make sure your entrails are strewn across the galaxy."

A hurricane of Force powers hit Vitiate at once. Lightning, rocks, fire, corrupted dreadseed vines, and even blasts from many instances of Brontes's tentacles. At the same time, Bestia felt her own injuries close up. She was reset to a point before she was wounded. She looked around, and saw other Dread Masters, and Valkorion, get up from the floor, and join the attack, except Calphayus and his counterparts. They were floating in midair, eyes glowing.

A surge in the Force like Bestia has never felt before surrounded Calphayus. Time and space distorted around him. The cracks spread from below him, each seemingly connecting to the alternate Dread Masters.

Far below, Oramis the Scion watched as a blaster wound through her chest healed. She was supposed to die. But suddenly time stopped, and then reversed. She had another chance.

She stepped away from the frenzied skytrooper. All around her, she saw a similar thing happen to her allies.

Someone shouted, pointing up. The Scion looked up, and was confronted with a sight far beyond anything she had ever seen. The sky around the eternal spire was broken, for lack of a better description. A spider web of cracks radiated from a central point. Oramis guessed the center of the calamity was the Eternal Throne room. It looked like a broken computer screen that someone punched in a fit of rage.

Something was behind those cracks. Something shifting and blinking. Oramis squinted, trying to make it out. Then, a piece of reality sort of faded away. And she was looking at an enormous eye staring back at her impassively. It had no color anyone present could name, and at the same time, it was every color in existence.

The fighting ceased. Everything ceased. Time was frozen. There were more eyes looking down through the gaps in reality.

And yet, despite there not being words to quite describe the scope of what she was seeing, Oramis felt no fear. If anything, she felt at peace. She felt, well, seen. Acknowledged.

A phrase she heard one of the Dread Masters say came to mind. The prophet one, whose teachings helped her see past the rigid fanaticism of the Scion order.

"The Force is alive and covered in eyes."

Calphayus had said it with a peaceful certainty, like it was the most ordinary thing ever. Maybe to him, who peered into the pathways between past and present for so many years and even centuries, it was.

Whatever was happening inside the throne room, whatever caused the reality to crack and time turn back, it was significant enough to draw the eyes of the Force itself.

Bestia shifted back to the Dread Beast form, and pounced at Vitiate. He was too busy holding back the assault from alternate Dread Masters, and Bestia's claws slashed through the undulating shadow hair and into his back. Black blood sprayed into the air, and floated there. Vitiate screeched, and dropped to his knees. All the attacks he was holding back slammed into him, and Bestia jumped back to avoid the blast.

When the smoke cleared, it was Vitiate's turn to be on his knees. He was surprisingly intact, but his robes were charred, and most of his long hair was gone. Bestia glanced around as she advanced towards him. The alternate Dread Masters were gone. Calphayus lay face down on the ground, Styrak kneeling by his side. Rammas was approaching Vitiate as well. Brontes stood near Calphayus, hand extended. Metallic tentacles grew from the ground and restrained Vitiate. Rammas, Bestia, Valkorion, and Sharack loomed over him. Vitiate suddenly realized that he couldn't do anything. He was completely spent.

"I know everything." Rammas said. She felt numb. "You didn't even give me a name. Just called me a demon if I existed too much, and I thought it was my name and then Jarak thought it would be funny to tattoo it on me. I wasn't even supposed to be a fucking person."

"There are so many people in this place that deserve to land the killing blow on you." Bestia growled.

"I stab him." Sharack then pointed at Bestia. "You bite him in half. And you..." she turned to Rammas, staring at her blankly. "Shit, I don't know what you or Valkorion do, sorry."

"He made me in his image. Gave me the same powers as he has."

"Eat him then. Use these powers for good."

Use the powers for good. Like she did to save Vaylin. Still, Rammas was afraid. What if she'd become Vitiate? What if he'd get reborn through her? What if he found some way to take her over from the inside like a fucked up parasite? She sighed. At least she was sure there were several people willing to stop her if that happened.

Vitiate's black eyes widened as Sharack's blade pierced his chest. Again. Torrents of golden lightning slammed into him. And then a maw full of sharp teeth descended upon him, biting him clean in half. There was no blood, not in the conventional sense. Instead, shadows poured out. Bestia spat the upper half out the next moment, clearly disgusted. Rammas took a deep breath, reaching for the black hole at the heart of her being, and pulling Vitiate's unraveling presence into it. Bestia was right: it tasted foul even as Force energy. And then it was gone.

Time resumed in the throne room. Shyren kicked a skytrooper off the walkway before spinning around and driving their vibrosword through another. The bloody things kept coming, and even after being seemingly renewed, the Scion was tired. Their body ached with exhaustion that Heskai's healing could no longer stave off.

More came through the doors. Shyren felt despair eating at their innards.

And then the skytroopers froze and went limp, weapons falling to the floor. Shyren approached them cautiously and poked one with a foot. It stayed still.

They sensed it then. An immense weight lifting off the shoulders of the galaxy. They turned around, and saw Valkorion stirring on the throne. Heskai was already by his side. The Dread Masters, Sharack, and Rammas were waking too.

Rammas's eyes opened to the glass dome ceiling of Zakuul's throne room. She heard groaning around her as the others woke up. Shyren's furry muzzle blocked the view, and Rammas sat up. Her head felt oddly heavy. She saw Sharack already up and staring back at her warily. Bestia was getting up. Calphayus was unconscious, with Styak by his side, channeling the Force into him.

She saw Valkorion stir on the throne and flinch when his eyes landed on Rammas. His typical reaction, although a bit more intense than usual. Heskai ran over to the emperor, checking him over and trying to heal him while Valkorion protested and told Heskai to not overexert himself.

Rammas moved to get up, and suddenly found herself tangled in a curtain of hair. Her own, apparently. Shyren helped her up, and she stood there, dumbstruck, looking at the stars outside. She picked up one of the strands and examined it. The hair was pitch black and shiny, but gradually lost the shine towards the ends, becoming seemingly incorporeal.

Rammas panicked. Was her fear coming true? Was the hair a sign that Vitiate would be reborn through her? She bolted towards the exit, but Styak stepped in the way. Dread flooded the short Sith.

But, instead of killing her, Styrak put his hands on her shoulders. It was a gentle gesture, especially coming from him.

"You're okay."

Rammas froze, looking up at him.

"I'm turning into Vitiate, I'm not okay!"

Styrak held Rammas's gaze for a long time. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she looked away, blinking.

"I do not sense him." Styrak finally said.

He pulled Rammas into an awkward but gentle embrace. She clung to him, face hidden in his robes, trying to ground herself.

"Neither do I." Bestia replied.

"I think he's truly gone."

"He is." Said a deep voice laced with relief. "The black hole I kept seeing is gone too."

Calphayus was pretty content sitting on the floor for now, his head still spinning. He would probably need a long, long rest after this.

"So, you can see past this point now?"

"I can. But I think I will hold off on doing so for a while, and enjoy the present for once. I suggest Heskai and the Scions do the same."

Calphayus kept sitting on the floor as Valkorion tapped away at a control panel set into the throne's armrest. Holocameras came to life around the throne, surrounding him with their glow.

"Citizens of Zakuul and the galaxy. This is Emperor Valkorion speaking."

In many corners of the galaxy, the message was met with a resounding **"What?!"**.

"I was given a chance to heal and right the mistakes of the past. I was given a second chance. And so I wish to start by withdrawing Zakuulan forces from the planets occupied during the end of my reign, as well as during the reign of emperor Arcann and Empress Vaylin. A token force will be left, directed towards restoration. The Star Fortresses will be dismantled in short order."

"I would like to extend my gratitude towards the Eternal Alliance and its champion, Bestia."

He nodded at Bestia, and she ascended the steps to stand beside the throne.

"Without her, I would still be in the clutches of Tenebrae. One that the wider galaxy knew as the Sith Emperor, I believe."

"The devourer of worlds is no more!" Bestia shouted.

"I wish to gift a small contingent of the eternal fleet to the Eternal Alliance, as a sign of my gratitude."

"I can't speak for Lana, but I don't think she'll mind using those ships to help restore the galaxy." Bestia said.

Valkorion nodded graciously.

"I pledge the eternal fleet to the task of healing as well. As much as I can spare the resources. That is all for now. Emperor Valkorion out."

Valkorion ended the transmission and reclined back into the throne. He looked exhausted, but also relieved and happy.

"I cannot believe I am free of Tenebrae."

"Me neither." Bestia said.

She sat on the edge of the throne platform.

"There is one more thing."

"Yeah?"

"I have been informed that your home planet has been rendered uninhabitable by my son's attack."

"Yeah. Oricon's, well, fucked. It can be rebuilt but we don't have the resources right now. And lately I've been wondering if I even want to go back."

"Whatever your decision is, you and the Dread Masters are welcome to stay on Zakuul for as long as you need."

Bestia turned to face Valkorion and smiled at him.

"Thank you. That means a lot. You're about the only person who doesn't view me, and the other Dread Masters with immediate hostility. I can't say we didn't earn that hostility, but it's nice to be treated with kindness for once."

Bestia chuckled, looking down at the throne room. The other Dread Masters mostly sat or stood around, resting.

"I don't think I'll ever become a beacon of light, but I don't want to be a murderous beast anymore. I don't think I ever did. None of us really did. Especially not me and Calphayus."

"You were not given a choice."

"Pretty much. It was either: become replacements for my mother, die, or do the thing except now your brain is Vitiate free real estate. You of all people know how it is."

"I do." Valkorion said.

Bestia looked over at the stars outside of the throne room. With Vitiate gone, they seemed somehow brighter.

"Now we can chart our own path for real."

Chapter End Notes

So this is it. The chapter that was initially planned as the ending of Bestia's Wrath as a whole.

Mini-playlist:

Calphayus's Wrath: <https://youtu.be/8KhmTVWkNws>

Final fight: <https://youtu.be/VdO63luN--8>

Also, for the final time: birds flipped: 17

At the Ruins of Oricon

Chapter Summary

After years, Bestia and the Dread Masters confront the rancor in the room.

Chapter Notes

Music: Puella In Somnio - Yuki Kajiura - Madoka Magica OST

<https://youtu.be/BJ808JR2PNY>

The devastation wrought upon the face of Oricon was obvious even as the shuttle bearing the Dread Masters disembarked from the underbelly of Deimos, Brontes's flagship.

The shape of the landmass the Dread Palace and its surrounding fortress stood on was changed, large chunks missing and glowing lava filling them. Bestia sighed, dreading the sights to come. She knew Oricon was damaged by Arcann from what Brontes and the others had told her. She'd been debating internally if it was worth it to return. And to make the final decision, she had to confront the scope of destruction herself.

As the shuttle descended, Bestia's heart fell. She could see the scale of destruction more clearly now. The main watchtower lay in complete ruin, its forked crest toppled to the side and shattered. The Dread Fortress complex wasn't much better off, although the shields protected it somewhat before they failed.

The main tower of the Dread Palace, however...

The top of the tower was completely gone. Bestia was surprised the Phobis Device held there had survived the blast to be stolen by Arcann.

She gritted her teeth. Such disrespect. At least they didn't steal her mother's coffin. At least Bestia hoped they didn't, and that the burial site was intact.

The rest of the palace complex was in a similar state to the fortress: ruined but not completely destroyed.

The shuttle circled around the palace as Tyrans looked for a flat and stable spot to land. A grim silence hung among the Dread Masters.

"It looks bad." Tyrans finally rumbled.

"No shit." Bestia said.

Tyrans finally located what was left of one of the landing pads. Bestia was pretty sure it was the same one she and Styrak had used when they returned from Ziost all those years ago. Ironic.

Tyrans carefully landed the shuttle, and a ramp opened with a hiss.

Bestia was first to stand before the exit, followed by Tyrans and Styrak. She hesitated before stepping out onto the ramp.

Familiar Oriconian air hit her, filled with heat and the smell of burning. She glanced over her shoulder, seeing Styrak scowl at the heat.

"Home sweet fucking home." She said grimly.

The landing area was strewn with debris, yet the entrance to the palace proper was untouched. A dead dread guard lay by the archway, mostly buried beneath a pile of rock. Only a portion of the upper body remained visible. Tattered robes clung to bones but the head was still encased in the golden crested mask. Tendrils of Dread Seed poked out of holes in the Dread guard's robes.

Styrak stopped, extended an arm, and debris lifted off the dead guard. He knelt before them, and carefully removed a golden medallion off their neck. Immediately the etched mask disintegrated into fine golden dust that was drawn into the medallion.

Still silent, Styrak carefully lifted the remains, and levitated them over the wall. He muttered something in the Sith language as he slowly lowered the Dread guard's body into the lava.

Bestia sighed as she watched.

Styrak stood silently for a few moments, then nodded his head, and rejoined the group.

"Felt wrong to leave them unburied." He said.

"How many more are there within the palace?" Calphayus asked mournfully.

"I don't know. Quite many guards have survived, but this can't be the only one that was less lucky." Bestia said.

She was at the head of the group when they entered the palace.

Ruddy light filtered through the gaps in the ceiling as the tower was completely gone. Piles of rubble littered the floor, which had caved in in a few places.

Bestia could sense Brontes's scowl as she stared up at what had been her sanctum and library.

Of course she had backups aboard her flagship, as well as more copies stored on secured Holonet servers. But you couldn't back up physical sith artifacts, or cybernetic prototypes. Those were lost, or stolen by Zakuul.

Styrak and Rammas split off, standing by the cavernous archway that led onto a set of stairs going down.

"We will check the lower levels." Styrak said.

His voice was even, but Bestia could see the tension in his posture. He has been waiting for this for years. To finally learn the fate of his beloved Kell Dragons.

Rammas followed him quietly, the shadowy end of her ponytail dragging on the floor behind her. She had been trying to get rid of the shadow mane eating Vitiate's soul had left her with, but all she and Styrak succeeded in was shaving the sides. The shadows conceded that much.

Rammas led the way, carefully navigating around piles of cracked bricks and stone. Despite that, the stairway was much more intact than the upper levels, something that bode well for the state of the sublevels and Styrak's sanctum.

"How are you holding up?" He asked, the question unfamiliar on his tongue.

He always felt unsure and awkward talking to people who weren't Bestia and Calphayus, but he came to care about Rammas, and wanted to make an effort to reach out.

"I'm...okay, I guess." Rammas shrugged. "I thought the hair would go back to normal after I released the souls Vitiate ate back to Nathema and Ziost but..."

She picked up the shadow ponytail, looking at it scornfully as it partially phased through her fingers. It looked and felt wrong. On the one hand it seemed to behave like a solid object, dragging along the floor and being able to be picked up. On the other hand, it was incorporeal. It didn't pick up grime or dust, which Rammas was grateful for, and it was somewhat translucent.

"It's still fucking here." She said balefully. "I feel like I'm some fucked up edgelord version of that princess with the long magic hair from that human story."

"I see." Styrak said with a nod.

He moved into the corridor leading up to his sanctum, keeping a slow pace.

"I mean I guess I'm technically a princess???" Rammas threw her hands up in the air. "One of my moms is a Massassi princess."

She huffed.

"At least they took it well. My spine is still slightly pulverized from all the hugging."

Styrak chuckled.

"It was a humbling experience to meet someone taller than I am."

Rammas laughed.

"You were wearing a mask but I know your face was priceless."

They approached a tall doorway, decorated with a mosaic of bones. Rammas's smile fell. She stopped at the entrance to the throne room, and waited for Styrak to catch up. He limped to stand next to her, leaning on his cane and peering into the gloom.

"We're here. Your sanctum."

She stepped aside and let Styrak be the first to enter. He limped past her, and after hesitating for a moment, stepped over the threshold. Rammas followed him.

It was dark inside Styrak's sanctum, and he lit up his lightsaber, extending the hilt into a staff so he could both lean onto it and use it for illumination.

Purple light revealed a room that was mostly intact. Mostly. Many larger bones were missing, including the krayt dragon skull that Styrak's throne was nestled in. The Dread Master grumbled to himself.

"Do you think they're on Zakuul?"

"That is the best case scenario. Otherwise, it may indicate that other scavengers have been here. And I don't need to explain why that's bad."

He really didn't. An abandoned Sith compound chock-full of advanced technology and dangerous Sith artifacts did not mesh well with scavengers looking for a quick credit. Especially given the Zakuul museum Phobis Device incident.

"If they're on Zakuul we can get them back."

"That is true."

Styrak proceeded cautiously towards the back of the chamber, where a small tunnel led to a series of natural caves where his Kell dragons lived.

He stopped at the precipice once again, hesitant to venture forward. What would he find in those caves? Would his beloved Kell Dragons be nothing but dessicated corpses? Would they still be alive? Would the caves themselves even be intact?

Styrak supposed there was only one way to find out. He steeled himself, and went forward. He was determined to get this over with, at least.

Rammas followed him silently.

The cave system appeared untouched as far as Styrak and Rammas could see. There was minor damage to the walls and a few rocks lay on the ground, knocked loose by the quakes from above.

Styrak slowed down, stopping to listen every few steps. Rammas mimicked him. For the most part, the caves were quiet, but a shuffling noise ahead caused both Sith to freeze for a few moments.

The two Dread Masters exchanged a look before proceeding towards the source of the sound.

They emerged into a larger cavern. Many openings lined the walls, some collapsed and some intact.

Several reptilian creatures lay by a far wall. They looked thin, and one was gnawing on a bone. A mangled piece of golden armour lay on the floor closer to where Rammas and Styrak were standing. She saw a helmet, crushed like a rations can, sitting some distance away. It was golden and once had the flared shape common to knights of Zakuul.

Rammas stayed by the cave entrance and pulled out her communicator to report the findings. Meanwhile Styrak slowly advanced towards the Kell dragons. He wasn't sure how they'd react to him after so long apart. Would they even recognize him?

Their state pained Styrak, but it made sense after years in isolation with not much to eat. That they were even alive was a miracle. If he could nurse the beasts back to health, and acquire a few more, he could get a stable population going again.

The rest of the Dread Masters stayed together as they methodically combed through every doorway they could find.

Bestia's sanctum was completely overgrown with dreadseed, but otherwise intact. She had to hack her way through to get to her chambers, noting a few sets of golden armour and many droid parts entangled in the growth. She smiled grimly. Her lair didn't let Arcann's people in without a fight.

Although now the Zakuulans were technically her people as well.

She sighed, cutting her way through a doorway. Her room had also become filled with dreadseed without anyone stemming its growth.

"Man, what a mess."

This was worse than the state of Bestia's room back on Ziost when she was a teen. Way worse.

Tyrans peeked from behind her shoulder and whistled.

"Yeah. That doesn't look salvageable."

"The chamber itself is, but all my things are probably ruined. Ugh."

Bestia sighed.

"Let's go check other rooms out."

Tyrans took the lead, moving cautiously and disabling the traps that had become activated with him absent. They found a few more dead bodies, this time scavengers who'd tried their luck with the abandoned complex in the years of Zakuulan occupation.

Bestia's holocom pinged. It was a message from Rammas informing her that Styrak had found a few living Kell Dragons. Bestia smiled. At least someone found something good here. All she'd been seeing so far was more and more proof that the Dread Palace wasn't really worth salvaging.

Tyrans's lair was also largely intact, reinforced as it was. The tiles making up the floor of the main chamber had partially collapsed from the impact of Zakuulan bombardment. A layer of dust covered everything and Tyrans scrunched his nose under his mask at the thought of having to clean the dust off all the fragile electronics.

At least the dust bore no tracks, meaning no one had reached Tyrans's chambers. His equipment sat untouched. It could be salvaged and repaired.

Tyrans moved around the room, and marked various computers and DJ consoles for retrieval.

Calphayus's wing of the palace wasn't as lucky as Bestia's, Tyrans's, and Styrak's. It was situated closer to the main tower, and together with it, had borne the brunt of the attack.

Bestia could sense her father's sorrow as he slowly tapped his way along a ruined path. He cautiously climbed over rocks until he came to a stop before a huge crater in the ground. Beautiful Voss tiles were shattered and thrown about, and from the edge of the crater rose the mangled remains of an ancient tree.

"It's all gone. I can't see life flowing through the tree anymore." Calphayus said quietly.

"I'm sorry." Brontes carefully put one of her metal tentacles on his shoulder.

They had to skip the stairs leading up to the upper level. There was no point as they'd seen the state of it when approaching, and Brontes and Tyrans have already been to Oricon before.

Brontes had already recovered everything she could. She had already grieved for what was lost. She'd already made peace with it.

Calphayus let out a quiet sob. The others clustered around him, letting him cry.

Oricon wasn't Calphayus's choice of home. It was thrust upon him and Bestia in the wake of Ha'nadi's death. But, it was an important place for his wife, and he tried his best to make it a home.

The garden was a huge part of it. Everything here was planted and tended by Calphayus's own hand. His Dread Guard and even a few of the other Dread Masters joined him in taking care of the plants.

It was a patch of vibrant green life among the ash-choked cliffs of Oricon. It was Calphayus's own way of saying "fuck you" to Vitiate, although he would probably never admit it.

The tree had been a jewel of Calphayus's garden. A sapling brought from Ziost and tended to over the course of a thousand years. It was coaxed into a curved shape and its foliage made a canopy over Calphayus's throne.

Rammas and Styrak emerged from the doorway and joined the group. Styrak joined Bestia in hugging Calphayus. She could sense grief coming off him in waves.

Rammas made her way around the ruined tree. She used to like hiding in it. Calphayus's garden was a place of rest for her as well.

Something drew her attention. A little bit of green was visible through a hole in the bark. Rammas frowned and climbed up the dead trunk, until she reached where it was broken off. There, in a hollow, grew a sapling.

Rammas skidded down the tree and ran towards Calphayus and the others, tugging on his sleeve. Bestia and Styrak glared at her, but Calphayus followed meekly, wiping tears from his face.

"It's not all dead." Rammas said.

Now that he was close, Calphayus could sense the life force of the small tree as well. He scooped Rammas up in a crushing hug.

The sapling was marked for retrieval as well. Calphayus would see to it personally.

They couldn't access the rest of the palace. Raptus's wing was blocked off and the dread council chambers had a large portion of the tower collapse into them.

The Dread Masters held council in the main hall instead.

"It's not worth it." Bestia finally said, voicing the thought that had been festering inside her brain for the last few years.

"It would take too much to restore it and let's be real: it wasn't our choice to be here in the first place. Vitiate, necessity, and Raptus made that choice."

"None of those are present." Calphayus said.

"And the location has been compromised for years." Tyrans added. "I don't know about you but I'm not a fan of everyone knowing where we live."

"I agree with Tyrans. The Empire and the Republic hold no love for us. I think the only thing that had stopped them from coming in with an even bigger fleet was the resurgence of Revan and later occupation by Zakuul." Brontes said.

"Moving away would be no skin off my back. If the new base is not on fire all the bloody time that would be fine by me." Styarak grumbled.

"I'll just follow the lead." Rammas shrugged.

Bestia looked over them.

"It is decided then. We return to Zakuul, and take advantage of Valkorion's offer. Until we find a new base of operations."

"Would be nice if it had a beach..." Rammas muttered as the group made its way to the crumbling exit. "What about Rishi? Lord Calphayus lived there during the five years you were frozen, and it's kinda full of weird people, I don't think anyone would pay any attention to us."

"That's an option."

"Also it's not on fire and has beaches."

Bestia chuckled.

"That sounds nice."

Rammas nodded, then followed Calphayus back to his ruined garden. He insisted she help him transport the sapling.

The irony wasn't lost on her. A child of Vitiate helping the one her father tormented rescue a vestige of life that survived the ruin of Oricon. A sapling of a tree whose species were pretty much wiped out when Ziost was devoured.

It was an honour and a sign that Calphayus accepted her despite her heritage.

They came to Oricon expecting to find ruin. And they did. But they also found hope.

The trip back to Zakuul was uneventful.

Calphayus and Rammas spent the time watching over the sapling. They'd planted it in a large container, and took turns looking after it.

Styrak rarely left the side of the surviving Kell Dragons. There were three, all from a younger generation. Despite their emaciated state, they were relatively healthy. Still, Styrak would have to find other Kell Dragons if he wanted to start a new population.

Tyrans worried over his computers and DJ sets. He cleaned the devices meticulously, and was currently going through a myriad of diagnostics to ensure they weren't damaged, degraded, or sabotaged.

Bestia sat by the holocom. An image of Valkorion floated above it, seated in his throne.

"How was the trip?" He asked.

Bestia shook her head.

"Not that good. It just confirmed something I knew all along. Oricon is not worth restoring."

She sighed.

"I am sorry." Valkorion said.

"We did recover some things. Tyrans's computers. A few Kell Dragons. A sapling from Calphayus's garden. He says he'll plant it wherever we decide to move next."

"You are more than welcome to stay on Zakuul. For as long as you need."

"Thank you."

Epilogue

Bestia, her family, and the other Dread Masters quickly settled in in the luxurious apartments Valkorion gave them. It took some time to get used to the opulence.

Bestia was endlessly grateful to Valkorion for giving her a place to live, and a Zakuulan citizenship on top of many honors for saving him and his planet. Still, this didn't quite feel like home. Neither did Oricon.

Despite stepping away from the Eternal Alliance, Bestia found herself as busy as ever, now representing Zakuul's interests in the Galaxy. So the search for an out of the way place to build a new home for herself and her family had to be squeezed in between other responsibilities. In the end, she left the task to Mu'hass and Rammas, trusting them to find the perfect place.

Another thing weighed on her and the other Dread Masters: they still had no idea where Raptus was or what he was up to. He was loyal to Tenebrae. Was he plotting vengeance? Was he planning to take over the Sith Empire, being the technical heir to the throne? Well, so was Rammas. Was she in danger now?

Rammas became sort of subdued, spending more time alone, or trying to find escape in playing hologames alone or with her friends. Bestia left her be, but assured her that she can always talk to her or Styrak.

Bestia didn't have a lot of time to dwell on things, as the Dread Masters busied themselves helping rebuild Zakuul. It was a slow process, as resources were scarce after the war, and Valkorion didn't want to take more than Zakuul absolutely needed.

So when a message came informing Bestia that it was safe to land on Lokath again, she immediately brought the news to Valkorion. The Emperor reached out to the Alliance, offering to join forces, and Bestia and the Dread Masters found themselves back on the tech planet, representing Zakuul.

What they found there were the Old Gods of Zakuul. They were trapped in metal bodies once again, forced to do the bidding of an extinct race.

Bestia found a way to communicate with one of them, Tyth. The god of Wrath found a kindred spirit in Bestia, and warned her of Betrayal. Before Bestia could free him or ask about the other gods, an explosion shook the chamber she was in, destroying the command throne.

Bestia survived, but now the Gods were waking up, and the only way to free them was the way Valkorion had taken hundreds of years ago: they had to defeat each of the gods in battle, destroying their metal prisons.

Valkorion himself came to Iokath, to free the Gods once again. He also hoped to secure technology that could be useful in rebuilding Zakuul.

The Dread Masters joined Valkorion, and five battles were fought across Iokath: Bestia against Tyth, matching his fiery wrath with her own; Tyrans and Brontes versus Aivela and Esne, twins against twins; Rammas, Shyren, and Vaylin, cursed children against the Hated Son, Nahut; Calphayus, a gentle soul, spoke to Scyva and talked her down without even igniting his lightsaber; and, finally, Styraak and Valkorion went up against Izax in a storm of lightning.

With the Gods freed, Valkorion returned to Zakuul, while Bestia lent her assistance to the Alliance once more. The traitor wanted her dead. This was personal.

Lana, Tyrans and Brontes looked far and wide, but didn't find anything.

Meanwhile the resource conflict relocated to the planet Umbara, where a shipment of rare Adegan Crystals was at stake.

Bestia went there, once again representing Zakuul, along with Lana and Theron of the Alliance. A Zakuulan, an Imperian, and one of the Republic.

Theron turned on them, revealing his hatred for Bestia and the Dread Masters. He didn't believe in their atonement. He just wanted them dead or back in Belsavis prison.

Theron trapped them on the train rigged to explode. Lana and Bestia escaped in the nick of time, and chased after Theron through the wilderness. Even with the Dread Beast's speed, Theron slipped away, leaving the two to return to their respective bases with the grim news.

At least they now knew who the traitor was. All that was left was to catch him.

Theron's trail led Bestia and Lana to the Chiss planet called Copero. Theron was after an ancient star map for unknown purposes. He slipped away once again, leaving Bestia with a fragmented map. Tyrans and Brontes took up the task of reconstructing it, hoping it would give them a clue to Theron's intentions.

While Bestia was on Copero, Rammas had disappeared.

At the same time, Alliance smugglers find an abandoned space station that transmits one word, over and over: ZILDROG.

Zildrog was one of Zakuul's gods. He was a brother to Izax, and the first husband of Scyva, and the father to Nahut. He was an evil god, bent on destruction, so Izax and Scyva exiled him to unknown parts and sealed him away.

Maybe what Theron is looking for is a machine containing Zildrog?

Bestia investigated the space station alongside Brontes and Tyrans, who found encrypted recordings left behind by Theron. He joined a cult called the Order of Zildrog, to fight against the Dread Masters. However, he learned that it was led by none other than Raptus, and chose the lesser evil of double crossing him, and giving Bestia the coordinates of the order's headquarters: Nathema.

Decrypting the recordings set the space station to self-destruct.

The Dread Masters and their allies returned to Nathema. Theron met them there, revealing that Raptus wanted to free Zildrog and use his power to take Tenebrae's place and build his own empire.

Bestia, the Dread Masters, and Sharack, fought through the ranks of the Order of Zildrog forces and arrived at the site of the machine, only to find Raptus there. He held Rammas hostage, planning to sacrifice her to Zildrog. She held Tenebrae's power inside her, alongside her own, and Raptus deemed it a worthy sacrifice to the god.

A fight broke out, the Dread Masters easily overpowering the Order's champions. But then Raptus severed the Force bond between the other five Dread Masters, causing them to collapse to the ground in immense pain.

Styrak managed to overpower the pain, attacking Raptus alongside Sharack. Raptus unleashed Force Fear onto them, causing Styrak to relive his death on Darvannis.

Raptus powered the machine on, and it took the lives of remaining Order of Zildrog members, including Theron and Senya, as well as draining Rammas. The machine opened up, and a grey serpentine dragon with a flowing void-black mane climbed out. Zildrog was free.

And Sharack stood alone against a god.

Raptus cried out in joy, only for the jaws to clamp onto him, sniffing his life out.

Rammas came to, finding herself face to face with the dragon. Bestia found the strength to jump and tackle Rammas, saving her life. However, Bestia's arm was lost in Zildrog's maw.

Rammas reached inside her soul finding the black hole at the core of her being. The same black hole she called on to defeat her father. She called onto the hunger again, and started draining Zildrog's power until there was nothing left, and Sharack decapitated the dragon.

Rammas's body changed, giving her a draconic appearance. She felt like a monster once again, until Bestia limped to her, smiling and leaning onto Styrak for support. They told Rammas she had a place with them, no matter what.

Battered and bruised and exhausted, they left Nathema.

Mu'hass found an island on Rishi that was out of the way and peaceful.

Bestia grew a new arm for herself out of Dread vines.

Valkorion eventually stepped down from the throne, transitioning Zakuul to be governed by elected officials, one of whom was Koth. The former emperor retired to live with his partners Heskai and Shyren and the three opened an animal shelter together.

Calphayus and Rammas planted the sapling they had found on Oricon, in the garden of their new home on Rishi.