

A shiver ran through TuQ'uan's body as he pressed his body up against the craggy crystal wall that made up the central structure of the Fortress of the Unchained. He had almost gotten used to the creepy feeling emanating from this forsaken place, *almost*. Just how he had made his way this far into the fortress without getting caught, TuQ had no idea, but he was employing an abundance of caution to ensure his efforts thus far weren't a waste.

*I have a bad feeling about this...*, he thought to himself, but if he were being honest with himself, there was rarely a time these days where he didn't have a bad feeling. Is that what getting older feels like?

Poking his head around the edge of the wall TuQ found himself staring at an open, circular room with a railingless staircase that jutted out of the crystal hugging the outer wall of the room. So much for sneaking through the next area, now the mercenary needed to rely on his luck. Oh, and his blaster, he could rely on that too. Taking a deep breath he began scrambling up the stairs trying to strike a balance between quickly and quietly.

"My god man, have some dignity and just walk up the stairs like a normal being, I already know you're here," the soft yet commanding voice of a man echoed from above. TuQ lifted his gaze to see a human standing on a ledge at the top of the stairs, their eyes met as the figure shook his head and turned to walk away. The Kel Dor stood up, putting as much pride in his stance as he could muster, straightened his hat and made his way up to where the strange man had spoken from. At the top of the stairs he found a landing that looked out over the fortress below.

"Hmm, I was expecting someone who could actually challenge me," Loremi spoke, unable or maybe unwilling to hide his disappointment. He closed his eyes for a moment and sighed. "And not even one of the famous dark Jedi. Just a simple hired gun."

"And here I was expecting someone a little more...original," the Kel Dor chuckled. "You look like a placeholder for someone more important."

Loremi's calm facade slipped momentarily but he was able to compose himself quickly. His hand brushed back his jacket to reveal a lightsaber clipped to his belt. Loremi's empty hand raised his side, open palm facing downwards and his fingers twitching. TuQ mirrored the Arbiter of Balance. Time seemed to stand still as the two men locked eyes, the light above beating down on them like a high noon sun.

In a flash, TuQ had his blaster in hand and let loose a volley of plasma, firing from his hip. Anyone slower would have been injured or dead by the attack, but Loremi's lightsaber shot from his belt and into his hand, the copper blade already ignited and ready to deflect the blaster bolts. Well, that didn't work. Time to try plan B. Letting out the fiercest battle cry he could, TuQ charged forward relentlessly firing on his opponent.

Surprise took hold of Loremi as he attempted a tactical retreat, attempting to struck a balance between moving backwards away from the advancing Kel Dor and continuing to deflect his

onslaught of plasma. TuQ's aim took on a wider spread forcing his foe to swing wider and wider to defend himself. As he closed the distance TuQ suddenly switched his strategy and threw himself headfirst at Loremi.

Caught off guard, Loremi stumbled backwards slashing wildly. A horrifying scream of pain erupted from the Kel Dor's throat as he rolled to the ground, the smell of seared flesh filling his nostrils. The cooper blade had sliced horizontally across his chest leaving him in excruciating amounts of pain. From his prone position on the ground TuQ lifted his blaster, his blurry vision making it hard to focus on his target. Rage and pain fueled him as he unloaded on Loremi, not caring where he was aiming, he just prayed one of his shots landed.

Loremi was leaning on the balcony's railing, panting as the crazed Plagueian fired randomly, squeezing the trigger until his blaster clicked empty. He was done with this silly battle.

"It's over. You lost." Loremi straightened himself. "You won't need this anymore." He raised his hand and felt the Force flood through him, connecting himself to everything around him, his senses heightening with an intoxicating feeling. Waving his hand over his shoulder, Loremi used the Force to toss TuQ's DL-44 into the darkness below. "And, what is with this ugly hat?"

Loremi repeated the action, tossing TuQ's treasured hat off into the abyss. Anger swelled inside the mercenary as he stretched his hand out in Loremi's direction. A feeling welled up in him, something he had never felt before, something dark and evil. But something that felt sweet and alluring. Whatever this feeling was, he wanted more. He wanted to invite it into him and let it fill him up. He never wanted to give this feeling up. Starting in his chest, the feeling spread. First to the rest of his body, up his neck and into his head, then down his arms and into his hands. As his vision worsened all he could think about was throwing Loremi over the balcony to suffer the same fate as his hat. As that thought consumed him, that feeling left his head and legs and body and concentrated in the palm of his hand.

"Ahhhhh!!!!" TuQ cried out, he could almost see sound waves crash into his hand and follow along behind what his mind had perceived as a wall of force driving towards the Arbiter. When the invisible wall crashed into Loremi, his body was thrown backwards. A sickening crunch came as his spine collided with the railing and he was thrown over the balcony and off into the dark night that surrounded the forsaken Fortress of the Unchained.

The strength quickly rushed out of the Kel Dor as he lay prone, staring at his hand in awe. Was this the power his fellow Plagueians constantly sought more of?

*I get it now*, he thought as he slipped into unconsciousness.