

“When the Sun Sets”

TW: Violence depicted in graphic detail.

Dallenor

Mid-Rim

41 ABY

Savran Has watched the last sliver of Dallenor’s sun dip below the horizon, leaving the planet’s sea of warm sand to adopt a bluish tinge born from the reflected light of a distant moon. Approximately sixty meters ahead on a rocky outcropping, four large tents were arranged in a diamond formation. Five soldiers dressed in dusky brown composite armor stood with their rifles in hand--two were facing Savi while the other three broke away to patrol the camp's perimeter.

Savran's goggles amplified ambient light, allowing them to see the soldiers clearly despite how dark it was. Each soldier was armed with EL-16 blaster rifles--a standard-issue weapon used by proper soldiers and mercenaries alike. Designed to be lightweight and deadly accurate, the BlasTech-designed rifles made for excellent tools for myriad combat applications. Adjusting the focus of their goggles to get a better look at the sentries and their gear, Savran felt the feathers on the back of their neck stand at attention when they examined their armor more closely. Sewn into the chest piece of each soldier's armor was a hexagonal patch with a crimson lambda symbol sewn into its center.

"Aegis. . ." they muttered beneath their breath, careful to keep their voice low lest they attracted their target's attention.

What the frakk was Aegis doing here?

Savran had no doubt that eliminating a team belonging to the Children of Mortis would be difficult, but she hadn't expected them to hire Aegis mercenaries to accompany them. This was going to be more arduous than they anticipated. Whatever these *palnan* were looking for Dallenor, it was clearly important to them . . . important enough for them to hire the private military contractor that formerly included Savran themselves amongst its ranks.

After pulling their hood above their head, the brick-colored Shani slipped from behind their cover and crept eastward, using the large rock formations scattered throughout the area to creep toward the soldiers' general direction. A brief scan of Savi's surroundings confirmed that there was no suitable area beyond this point, leaving an area of just under thirty-five meters of open sand between themselves and the Aegis personnel. Savran's feathers bristled agog when they realized that, if they had no other choice but to spring across the field to eliminate their targets. The inherent risk involved with such a brash maneuver made the Shani's heart flutter. Good. A little fear was an excellent motivator to eliminate targets with brutal efficiency.

Savran locked onto the soldiers they could see and spent a few moments to create an attack plan. "You'll die first, then you ..."

Oh, kark it. Letting their body decide what action was best in the moment was far more exciting, anyway. They'd spent enough time sneaking and planning. Savran's ravenous hunger was beginning to rear its delightfully brutal head. They craved violence. It was time to introduce them all to the predator known as Tekuani.

Savran leapt from cover and broke into a full sprint, their nigh soundless, rapid footfalls propelling them across the warm sand at an alarming pace.

One.

In the middle of their stride, one of Savi's hands floated over their right thigh to pull their vibrodagger from its scabbard.

Two.

The Aegis soldiers standing guard outside the tents noticed movement and turned to see what it was. When they saw a wild-eyed Shani rushing toward them, they raised their weapons and fired.

Three.

Each guard fired a single shot but Savran saw them coming from a mile away. Their body reacted on pure instinct, slipping and rolling with preternatural grace just outside the path of each blast of superheated tibanna gas—the sweltering heat against their skin fueled Savran’s lust for battle.

Four.

Now, they had reached them. Covering thirty-five meters in four seconds flat wasn’t bad, maybe even a new personal best. The first soldier learned what a knife to the forearm felt like, which left him fumbling to lift his rifle—a futile effort since Savi ensured that the dagger’s oscillating blade cut deep enough to sever the flexor digitorum profundis and flexor pollicis longus muscles responsible for grip in that arm.

Sailing on to the second soldier, Savran swatted a front kick aimed at their torso aside before retaliating with a horizontal swipe aimed at the narrow space in the soldier’s helmet where their eyes were. The lucky bastard managed to duck in time, but they didn’t see the second attack coming. Switching to a reverse grip, Savi fired the vibrodagger’s blade back across, plunging it into the between their helmet and chest-piece roughly where their carotid artery should have been. The rapid and heavy expulsion of blood from the soldier’s neck confirmed that Savi hit their mark.

Savi spun on their heels to face the injured Aegis soldier who still hadn’t realized that he had no chance of picking up that rifle, let alone firing it, with one arm. Full lips tattooed the color of onyx peeled back to reveal a set of pointed teeth that curled backward slightly into their mouth. Savran crossed the paltry distance between them in a single, Force-enhanced step, and ripped the helmet off their head to see who was beneath it. A Kiffar femme stared back at them with eyes as wide as the moon above their heads.

“Oh, honey . . . you look like you’ve seen a ghost,” Savran cooed, their crown of feathers fluttering aggressively. Their forked tongue flicked across the Kiffar’s face to sample the delectable fear she exuded.

Stirring in the distant tents and the voices of the remaining Aegis personnel over the woman’s comlink reminded Savran that they had a mission to complete. They’d have time to savor their meals later.

“I wanted to take my time with you but duty calls, I’m afraid,” they said, words dripping with palpable disappointment. “Consider yourself lucky that you get to be a snack instead of a proper meal.”

Before the Aegis scum had a chance to protest, which their prey often did, Savran struck. They unhinged their powerful jaws to reveal extra flesh-colored skin that stretched to accommodate the sudden expansion of their mouth beyond one-hundred-eighty degrees. Hitherto hidden amongst the other teeth were two fangs that unfolded and hung a whole two inches beyond the rest of their pearly-whites.

It took a single bite to sever the woman’s head from her body, which Savran let hit the ground before waiting for her other prey to arrive.

The engagements that followed were short and gruesome. It even surprised Savran how easily they’d managed to eliminate the remaining soldiers. Had their skills and strength in the Force increased that much? Or was the Aegis that rose to prominence decades ago when Savran served in its ranks a shadow of its former self?

By the end of it, the dark grays and blues of their robes had acquired a third color: deep sanguine. Nearly a dozen mangled bodies lay at their feet, each covered in lacerations or missing limbs that had been flung across the campsite. One particularly unlucky member of the Children of Mortis’ Startouched division had his entrails snatched from his body, adding to the gruesome tapestry of blood and gore that decorated Dallendor’s pale sands.

The Shani ruffled their feathery mane to shake off any blood or flesh in their hair. There was no help for their robes, so they would just have to wait until they found a hotel with a good refresher to take care of the stains. Learning how to get blood out of clothes was one of the best decisions Savi learned in their youth; it saved them a ton of credits and prying eyes they would have attracted by taking their clothes to the cleaners every time they went on a mission.

Savi produced their datapad from a small pouch on their belt and snapped a photo of the bodies, then one of themselves giving a thumbs up to the holocamera. After sending the image to the comlink code of their Arconan liaison, they started to type a message:

... *Mission successful. No survivors* ...

... *Going to see what intel I can gather. Be ready for exfiltration in five* ...

Once the message read “sent”, Savran put the datapad away and headed back towards the campsite. They quickly moved through each of the tents, tossing things aside and grabbing any datapads or code cylinders they could find and stuffing them into their backpack. After a few minutes of this, Savran figured they’d gathered enough for the researchers back on Selen to extract viable intel on the Children’s activities, so they exited the tent so they could leave.

An abrupt and violent quake of their feathers caught Savran’s attention, as did the smell of ozone that cut through the pungent smell of iron that wafted up from the broken bodies around them.

Move.

Savran heeded the Force’s call but by the time they willed their body to move, it was too late. The crackle of lightning rang in the air an instant before their body was hit with what felt like a thousand stun batons. *Kriff*. The first hit caught them unawares and hurt like hell, but the subsequent two that landed in rapid succession made their body seize violently before they hit the ground with a muffled *thud*.

Laying in a rigid, supine position, Savran caught a glimpse of a femme Cathar with sandy-brown fur and a mess of white hair as she approached with her hand held up to her ear. “This is Nithyr Thal, codename Solstice. I’ve apprehended a powerful Force user, though not without suffering the loss of my entire team. Send a shuttle and a sanitation team to collect us and to decommission this site.”

“W-What the kriff . . .”

That was all Savran managed to say before they slipped into unconsciousness.