Cassandra Oriana Tyris’ mind was foggy and dazed, with crackling and echoing sounds all around her. When she opened her eyes, in her vision colors were mixed and danced about with no coordination or focus. It took her nearly a minute before she mentally composed herself and began to regain her vision and hearing.

It was upon seeing the flames and electrical arcs on the bridge panels, many of them ajar or completely torn from their former locations, with both the pilot and co-pilot hunched forward that she remembered what had happened. At the start of the invasion into the Ethereal Realm her personal ship, the *Lancelot Albion*, a modified Kom’rk-class fighter, joined the vanguard forces in their incursion.

While everything had been going well the first hour, it was when they were approaching what had been called the ‘Corpse Fields’, that the ship suddenly lost all power as if it had been struck by an ion bolt. She could only watch in horror as the fighter descended toward a large chasm on the realm’s surface and braced herself as best she could prior to impact. he just narrowly managed to concentrate enough to raise a barrier and protect herself. It was that last second act that most likely had saved her life.

As she raised herself up from the floor, every fiber of her being ached in protest as if it demanded she stay down. Her balance was unsteady as she finally was on her feet, her hands on the wall to provide support, with slow constant breaths to keep from overexerting herself. Passively she extended her senses to the area around her, and was slightly saddened when she sensed no life around her. There had been six others with her, and she could sense none of them.

Gradually, she made her way to the rear of the severely damaged fighter, having had to traverse several sections where she had to squeeze her way through narrow gaps where the ship had almost collapsed upon itself after the impact. Finally at the rear section of the fighter, the first thing she had seen after forcing the door open were the bodies of the remaining crew members. As she forced herself to conentrate, she summoned her strength in the Force and blasted the docking hatch on the ceiling open and made her way outside.

A cold wind arced over her, with very little light to support. Far above she recognized the ambient glow that spread across the surface of the realm, and knew it was going to be a trek to make her way back up. The ship itself suddenly begun to move, preceded by several loud cracking noises and tumbling sounds. Cassandra barely grabbed onto a rock extension off of the wall and held on as the footing below her suddenly disappeared and was followed by smash after smash, then a bright light from below when the ship finally exploded.

Slowly and steadily she began her ascent, with occasional amplification of her strength when she had to make any kind of leaps to another part of the trench’s wall to be able and continue upward. Partway up the wall she had come across a narrow walkway which ascended a significant portion of the trench wall, and after she pulled herself up onto it she took a few moments to catch her breath and rest while knelt down.

It was strange, some parts of that ascent had seemed easy and had presented little trouble. Other parts it seemed almost as if she had to rely on her own athleticism, strength, and stamina without any kind of amplification even though she had willed it to help her. While the initial reports about the realm had mentioned the Force periodically amplified itself or seemed to all but disappear as if it did not exist, she had not anticipated it to be to this degree or frequency.

By the time she was halfway up with maybe another fifty feet to ascend, she was brought to pause as a figure stood before her in mandalorian armor, a figure she fully recognized.

“Regent General, it’s good to see you,” Cassandra said with an air of reassurance now about her as she approached. His appearance definitely made things easier, and would allow her to get out of this trench much simpler. She stopped in her tracks however when his lightsaber flew to his hand and ignited, its dark purple color sizzling the air around it. “Regent?”

He begun to move toward her with slow, firm movements as he stepped down the path. She had attempted to garner his intentions, but immediately had noticed she sensed nothing. In fact, everything around her fell entirely quiet and she was trapped in the here and now.

*“Not now…”* she thought to herself, having realized the Force was gone once again. While she was a master duelist, he was as well. She also knew that his physical strength outmatched hers and in a direct fight without the assistance of the Force, that she would not win. Suddenly he came at her and her martial arts training kicked in as she tucked herself and rolled forward, under the horizontal slash of his lightsaber. Back on her feet she had taken off at full speed up the path and continued her way up. She did not need to look behind her as she could hear his footsteps on the ground at a similar pace to hers. Why was he attacking her?

The only benefit, she knew, was that while the Force denied her at this moment, it also denied him. With maybe another thirty feet until the upper rim of the trench the path came to a sudden end and she halted herself at the edge, with hard and quick breaths. She had gained some ground ahead of him, though he still quickly approached with lightsaber still in hand.

As she latched her hands firmly onto the rocky wall she quickly began to climb, being careful in the placement of her feet and hands. If she messed this up, it was a long way down. A path down either to a rocky death, or dismemberment by lightsaber. Her concentration was locked on the ascent, especially when the hiss of the lightsaber disappeared. That meant he, too, was climbing. She had to reach the top, nothing else mattered.

Her strength quickly began to wane, but not much was left to go. Near the summit, the rocks were more flat with less room to grip or get a solid foothold. With what strength she had, she jumped upward from her location and gripped the upper lip of the trench, her fingers having burrowed deep into the dirt that was on the edge. The Force still would not answer her, and her body screamed in agony from the exertion she put upon it. Just one more pull, she had thought to herself, just one.

Ever slowly she moved upward, her arm muscles solidly visible. At this point, there was nothing she could do with her legs with nothing for them to lock onto. Firmly, she closed her eyes and screamed before she finally pulled herself up, threw her elbows onto the ground above, and hoisted herself over the edge and onto the flat ground. She breathed faster and harder than she ever had before, surely he could not be anywhere near.

What strength she had left in her she turned herself and glanced down the edge, but saw nothing. Zxyl was not just not climbing after her, he wasn’t even down the trench anymore. A breath of fresh air seemingly came across her as she felt the Force restore itself, once again aware of her surroundings and everything within the vicinity. Unless Zxyl was concealing himself, was he not there?

She realized that it could not have been the case as she would have seen him but a few moments ago. Slowly and steadily she made her way to her feet and surveyed her surroundings, the glow of the plants around her providing ample light for her to see. It was not far ahead that she saw skulls lay upon the ground before suddenly becoming thicker. Just beyond that were additional lights and movement. With a little concentration she was able to sense that there were people there as well, most likely one of the Brotherhood’s encampments.

One thing was certain to her as she made her way onto the skulls and toward them, with extreme difficulty in keeping her footing due to the natural movement of the skulls as she stepped, was that this mission was going to be far harder than she had expected.