

Doubt

42 ABY

Selen

Tisto still wasn't entirely sure how he had wound up here. It was not what he had expected as a punishment from High Councillor Gui. The former gang leader wasn't entirely sure what he could expect out of the Kid, but being sent to help Arcona as punishment for past treason had not been expected. Despite that, Tisto was glad he could help out Arcona. With luck he could find Diy, and... *What?* Thought the part of himself that felt like it was locked in ice. *Realize that the last of my friends also wants nothing to do with me? We were only ever business associates anyway. Face it Tisto, this path you decided to walk this late in your life is going to be lonely.*

The Kiffar brushed those thoughts aside as he looked around the woods he found himself in, making sure he didn't crash into anything as he got lost in thought. Tisto had been sent to check in on Odan-Urr's Besh Companies Speeder Squadron. He pulled the Black Thorn to a stop as he reached a cliffside, scanning the area for any sign of the twenty scouts. Tisto remembered putting in the order for those bikes back when he led the Joint Task Force Sunrider. *How many of the original twenty would still be in this squad, he thought to himself. And why have they not reported in?*

Something brushed at the edge of the Kiffar's mind. He clenched his hands into fists as a cold rage filled his senses. The former gang leader frowned when he noticed that happen, and looked down at his hands. Tisto forcefully unclenched his hands with a grimace. *Is seeing the loss of everything I helped build before I turned traitor really getting to me that much?* He brushed that thought aside. *Of course I am. I left saying the only good enemies are dead ones. Should I really be that surprised after five years of being away that what I had done is gone?*

Finally, Tisto heard something before he spotted it. Below him was the sound of blaster fire. Doing his best to keep busy so his thoughts wouldn't catch up to him, Tisto revved up the engine of his swoop, taking off to find a path down. He sped past some furry thing with crab-like claws, something that looked like a Varactyl but furry, and did a long arc to keep away from a

nearby... *How is there a frakking Gundark nearby and it hasn't crushed the other two animals?* Still, he had been informed of aggressive wildlife and Tisto did not intend to meet any of them directly. Especially if the wildlife was going to be so clustered together, he heard a sharp crack and watched as a nearby tree fell over. He hit his boost thrusters to speed away before the tree could hit his bike. *Oh great, the big one is throwing rocks!*

Tisto didn't bother turning around to face the beast. He had twenty scouts to find and boxing with a Gundark seemed like a horrible idea. *You are regretting not listening to the briefing, aren't you?* That thought was far more welcome than the ice that seemed to be right on the edge of his mind. The former gang leader focused on his ride, finding a small trail down the cliffside. Of course he had ignored the briefing, listening to it meant being in a position where his thoughts could catch him. *Something about angry animals, soldiers turning on each other, and people calling themselves gods.* That was all he needed to know to get his job done. *Get in, save the scout unit you had a hand in organizing, get out.*

Tisto almost lost himself as he sped down the cliff. The familiarity of the hum of his engine and the wind whipping against him filled him with a sense of warmth that pushed against the ice on the edge of his mind. Not fully, it still was there like something right outside his notice, but as he reached the bottom of the cliffside path its existence didn't matter. For a few brief seconds Tisto was one with his bike, and nothing else on this planet mattered.

Those precious seconds ended as Tisto saw one of the 614-AvA bikes with the Besh company sigil on it, the bike's rider lying on the ground. The Kiffer pulled to a stop, jumping off his bike. *Too late.* The second he was off the familiarity of his swoop, the ice at the back of his mind snapped back into focus. It spread over him quickly, his hands forming fists and his teeth clenching. Tisto shoved the feeling away with some difficulty and ran over to the scout. They were breathing slowly as the Kiffar reached them, blood covering their uniform from a few shallow stab wounds to the gut. The scout reached for their pistol when they saw Tisto, and instinctively Tisto called on the Force, ripping their weapon from its holster. The blaster flew across the shortening distance into Tisto's hand. The Kiffar tossed it aside as he went from a run into a slide to end up next to the scout.

"I'm on your side!" Tisto shouted as he placed a hand on the scout's torso.

The scout didn't seem to believe the Kiffar's words and moved to attack him. Tisto did not hesitate to bring down his other hand in a fist on the scout's chest. Electricity flashed from his shockboxing gloves and the scout recoiled from the blow.

"Don't fight me!" Tisto threatened quietly. "I am here to heal you. My name is Tisto Kingang."

At the mention of Tisto's name, the scout stopped, looking conflicted and angry. Despite the anger in the scout's face, they did not move as Tisto looked at their wounds. Unsure of what else he could do, Tisto allowed the Force to flow through him into the scout. Their wounds slowly started to close as minutes passed. Once he was done the Kiffar sat back. This scout was a Chiss and someone Tisto didn't recognize.

"I need your name soldier," The former gang leader said after a deep breath to keep the ice in his mind at bay. "What happened?"

The scout's eyes were focused on the dark green symbol on Tisto's armor. There was anger clear in their eyes but they didn't act while looking at the symbol. "Aty'avl'lostok. Are you really Tisto?"

Tisto paused for a second to consider the name. *Frakking Chiss never having easy names.* "Yes, I am. Yavll I need a report on what happened."

The Chiss's angry eyes met Tisto's. "Heard stories about you. Some say you were a great person to follow."

The Kiffar rolled his eyes, the ice in his mind pushing on him. *Why does it feel like the ice is getting stronger?!* "Yavll I need you to focus. What happened to the squadron?"

"We were sent off before everyone gathered up to go stop Chicyciot. We were supposed to follow caxquettes at a distance and report in. Then everyone got angry, started fighting each other," Yavll closed his eyes. "I'm the only one left. I... we started killing each other."

Too Late! Tisto had to focus on making sure his hands didn't form fists again. *My first time back fighting for the good guys and I failed again!* He couldn't keep his teeth from clenching. *No wonder all my old friends want nothing to do with me.* Tisto took a deep breath, calling on the Force. It came to him like a fire, spreading from something jagged inside him, loosening up his muscles as it passed through him. The ice was still there, but as Tisto focused

on relaxing his muscles it wouldn't touch him. The cold that was building, just on the edge of his mind, didn't retreat like Tisto had hoped but it didn't advance. It just grew from somewhere.

But why is it still growing?

Once he was relaxed he let the Force flow away from him, its heat fading away like an engine left to cool. Yet the ice didn't replace it. It just stayed in the Kiffar's mind. *You can't get rid of me until you die. You deserve this cold. After everything you have done, how could you not?* It seemed to taunt him in that way. It had been taunting him for a while now. *So why is it growing now?* Tisto pushed against those thoughts. "Yavll," he began slowly, "whatever drove you to that fighting is still planetside. I need you to work with me, Soldier. I will get you out of this."

The Chiss nodded slowly. "Yes sir. I still..."

The Kiffar stood up. "You will control yourself, soldier. Or I will tie your unconscious body to my bike and get you out."

Yavll stood up following Tisto's lead, presenting himself by standing at attention. "Yes sir!"

Tisto couldn't help but smile at that. The scout had just been through hell and clearly was still affected by whatever happened. *But why am I not? Something pushed darkness into these scouts for them to start killing each other, so why am I not affected?*

The ice in his head had the answer. *Because you are already dark. You are a killer. The first time you tried to be a Jedi you spent that time hurting your comrades. How can anything push you to do more of what you do every day? All you have done in coming back to Odan-Urr is give yourself more victims.*

Tisto was about to give an order when a flash of heat in his head got his attention. *Something is coming!* "Get on your bike Yavll!"

Tisto spun in the direction the heat came from in his head. He could see a pair of cat-like eyes staring at him. The Kiffar heard the engine of the scout's speeder as it started up and he stared into those eyes, eyes that seemed to stoke the ice onwards. Tisto felt his teeth clench, his hands made fists.

“I will be right behind you Yavll!” Tisto shouted at the scout. *Why am I yelling? I didn't mean to yell.*

To the Kiffar's relief, he heard Yavll start to speed away. With the Chiss leaving the eyes moved forward, out from the flora that covered them. They belonged to a thick-muscled Cathar wearing some sort of chain armor. A pair of vicious axes were held in its hands. “You did not give me **blood**,” the Cathar hissed.

Tisto shifted his right foot back on instinct. The ice in him wanted to fight. It pounded in his head as he raised his arms up, elbows tucked in. He bent his knees as the Cathar walked towards him. *This has to be that god they told me about.*

Tisto couldn't help but think that description was good as the Cathar closed the distance between them in a heartbeat and slammed an axe into the armor on his leg. It was what the Kiffar could do in his heartbeat of time to make himself like a pillar in the ground. His instincts taught him it would be enough to withstand the blow then fight on. Every occasion of fighting faster opponents had taught him that. So he stood against the blow, only to fall a second later as agony spread through him as if he were a bell. When he was on the ground the Cathar followed up the leg strike with one that Tisto felt bent the metal of his chestpiece. There was a sharp cracking sound, and Tisto knew from experience that some of his ribs had just given out. Not knowing what he could do he opened himself up to the force as the Cathar brought down his second axe. A sense of heat surged through Tisto's throat as he let out a guttural cry of pain. Tisto winced at his own voice as he did. For an instant, he didn't sound like a person at all but like the engine of a revving bike.

Whatever he just did, the Cathar's second axe missed and Tisto threw a right hook at the god's face as it shook its head from the loud noise. Electricity crackled as the blow connected, and the Cathar god stepped back from the blow. Tisto let the Force flow through him again, letting the heat surge through him bringing adrenaline in its wake. He needed that as he forced himself to stand, it helped him ignore the pain from his ribs and whatever was going on with his leg. It seemed to Tisto that he had made an enormous mistake in standing up as the god seemed to recover from the noise and slammed an axe into the Kiffars side. Tisto once again slammed into the ground, this time several feet away from where he had stood up. He looked

up to see the Cathar take a step towards him only to stop. It roared as it batted an axe to the side deflecting a blast from... *that's... too big to be from a blaster.*

Tisto could hear Yavll's angry shout as the speeder bike passed by. He made a mental note to thank the Chiss if there was some form of life after death. The ice seemed to be fading from Tisto's mind now even as a cold seemed to be seeping into his body from the side that took the axe blow. The Cathar god thing seemed to not be paying attention to Tisto anymore. The Kiffar looked at his bike and let the Force in. He reached out towards his bike while his foe was distracted. *I need to be able to get away!* He grabbed hold of the bike in his mind's eye, then looked back at the Cathar. Painfully he wrenched his arm to the side sending the bike flying into the Cathar. It hit with a crunch as it collided with both of his foes' axes. Something about this creature was just on a level that was difficult for the dazed and pained Tisto to understand. Thankfully, however, all the Cathars strength wasn't a match for the sheer mass of the bike and the pair flew into the flora of Selen. The Kiffar closed his eyes as the sound of a speeder engine approached him.

Tisto woke up to Yavll wrapping up his chest. The Chiss nodded when he saw the Kiffar's open eyes. "Thank you, Sir. The anger... I don't know what you did but..."

"Is that... thing dead?" Tisto interrupted.

"No. We were already on my speeder so we got away. But it's still alive, out there somewhere. I called in an evac for us sir," the scout sighed "You are going to need a good Jedi or a stint in a bacta tank after that."

Tisto looked to the ground. "I need to make a call, soldier."

Yavll nodded, walking off a ways to give Tisto some privacy. Tisto fumbled at his belt before pulling out a holoprojector. He poked at it for a few minutes to make sure it was working before starting his call.

"Been a while Green-Cheeks," came a familiar voice. "Could you have picked a better time? What do you want?"

A friend. But no, Tisto didn't have the strength to say that. *I don't deserve one anyway.* "I would like my flagship back," he forced on a smile. "But I don't think with all your new political power you can get Odan-Urr to give me control of the Sunrider. But I am here fighting to help you out of a jam so I need a new bike."

There was a pause. "A new bike? Survive this and Imma buy ya whatever model ya want."

Tisto forced out a laugh, hoping it sounded real. "Surviving this is how the old one got destroyed!"

There was another pause, as the person on the other end seemed to study him. "You don't like new things. Are you doing alright?"

No, but we won't talk anymore if I can't do my job. Tisto forced out another smile. "I just used the force to throw my bike at a god. I feel like I earned a new bike, Diy."