

## Overcome Yourself

**42ABY**

**Ussun, Selen**

**Ihausin**

The many limbs, eyes, and mouths were the warm welcome in the cold abyss. Aphotis kept diving deeper, her second skin tightening and acclimatizing as black water amplified the pressure. Her long, black tail was far more efficient at propelling her forward than the use of her arms and legs.

The depths were a place that allowed for an almost meditative state, with no sound interrupting her thoughts, except for perhaps the hiss of her own breathing and the air-bubbles that pressed out of her mask. Being vulnerable and surrounded by Alla'su's aquatic caxquettes was nothing short of nightmarish, but the familial bond they shared more than made up for it. She was among brothers and sisters, all ready to defend the Mother.

It gave Tir'eivra the opportunity to reflect on what atrocities she had committed to prove her loyalty to this family once again, just as she had done about three years prior in the temple. She had fought champions of a Clan she was once part of, showed her cards as a betrayer and yet she had no regrets. This time there were Children to be saved, a whole nest, and she had made their escape possible.

What was more important to the Sith than anything else, was the knowledge she gained. Never before had she siphoned life from one individual and used it to accelerate the growth of a whole nest of transforming creatures. She wondered what the three hatchlings would develop into. Perhaps she could use the ancient Sith temple on Kasiya to study them. Then there was the genetic material, safely sealed away in her backpack. Tir'eivra considered the adaptability of these caxquettes, the properties could be applied to anything, even herself.

Her heart pounded in her chest as pride swelled up. That accomplished feeling of dignity rippled through the song like war-drums summoning up courage for the thousands of shadows lurking with her in the sea. An echo followed like pulsed calls from a pod of Cartusion whales. There was an answer in the form of anger, coming from the north. Something was going down soon, and someone, or something had to heed the call.

Alaisy searched out the nervous melody resounding from the many sisters. They were bound to the water, and a conflict brewed on land. *She* had to go there. The call pulled at her second skin like fishing hooks reeling her in. But she was not alone. Finned arms stroked over her back, inviting her over.

A creature with glowing beads of eyes snaked by her, its body almost as sleek as herself. Tir'eivra's claw latched onto the backfin. A wave of radiant warmth accepted her embrace, letting her pull herself onto its slippery back. The caxquette let out a guttural growl, vibrating its

eel-like body as she patted it on its shoulder. Then it burst ahead like a proton-torpedo, its hindlegs and extremely long tail launching them through the water.

Her mask's visor-HUD pointed her from Ihausin towards Ehhtaet! National Park. They were going through the sea, safe from the lurking eyes of the four Clans sent in to deal with the threat. Aphotis would pick up the trio of hatchlings that she had saved from the nest's destruction later. She would find a way to take them offworld, to keep their legacy safe.

The song's melancholy transformed further and further into vexation the closer they came to their destination. Her eyebrows scrunched together and her jaws tensed. Something ancient was stirring, someone...

The aquatic beast slowed down and began to climb. An eagerness for bloodshed coursed over its skin and transferred to Alaisy's alchemical skinsuit, making the Sith tremble. It served as a preparation, or a shield of faith perhaps. It swam up to break the surface, with her on its back, allowing her to scout out ahead.

The caxquette's body curled up and pushed her off, its tooth-laden head nudging her. It couldn't follow her any further, she was to go on land by herself. Alaisy patted the creature on its shoulder before diving down just below the surface and kept going until she could reach the bottom with her tall boots. Two distinct figures shimmered through the water as she peered up.

Her mask hissed loudly as she climbed on land via slippery, mossy rocks. The first thing she heard as droplets ran down her visor were plastisteel *clicking* noises. Two blaster-rifles were aimed at her, trying to keep the Sith from climbing up to her full height.

"Halt! How in kark's name did you survive the invested sea?" A sub-staff officer in full armor questioned her, while his battalion's communications officer seemed to be relaying the information.

"We all have our methods, Officer. Now, let me through." Aphotis replied with a derogatory tone in her aristocratic voice. She pressed her visor into their guns, trying to get up.

"Hold up," the comms officer scrolled through his datapad, snapping his helmeted head back and forth from the screen to the Sith as he kept his weapon pointed at her, "this, this is the one from Ihausin, the betrayer."

"I am unarmed and will comply, just take me to your Major General, before I miss the glorious bloodbath about to unfold. Just cuff me up, it beats the alternative, believe me."

"Slow and steady, no sudden moves." The duo remained skeptical about the *unarmed* part. The sharp, long nails and blades on her heels certainly disputed her words.

Tir'eivra's time in Arcona was spent mostly on Selen. She could recognize the ranks of this regiment from a quick glance. The stun cuffs were a minor inconvenience if her instinct served her right. Her heart pounded with the rhythm of the song she heard drumming through the rock, earth and vegetation. The two soldiers apprehended her and she kept her word. She could feel the trepidation through his gloves grasping her arm. It was difficult for the Sith to withhold a chuckle as they marched forward to imminent doom.

The soldier pulling her along had to stretch himself all the way up just to reach her. Even a seasoned veteran couldn't hide the awkward feeling of inferiority next to someone as tall as her. Aphotis could feel his aura of confusion, despite the painfully tight grip. The *clicking* and *snapping* of her shiny second skin seemed to distract the trooper.

"Do you two not hear the cadence? A symphony of bloodletting awaits us," Alaisy's smoky voice had a sing-song quality to it. Her long tail swiveled to stroke the man's back.

"Save it, and keep that tendril to yourself!" The trooper's body shivered. He wanted to silence the woman for good after what he heard of her deeds, but the fragile state of alliances would've made that complicated. It wasn't his place.

A clearing presented itself, past the rocky coast, bushes, and dense trees. Commands were being shouted between entire battalions. Walkers patrolled in formation and tanks were being prepared. Everything was set up to deal with the threat.

Dajorra shone bright over the trampled grasses and clear ultramarine sky except for some stray cirrus clouds. The idyllic sight had a chill to it like early spring, dewy and cold. Two soldiers and a tall, black-clad woman emerged from the darkness of the woods. Everything in front of them began to stir, like an anthill being disturbed. Aphotis had hoped it was her appearance that caused the ruckus, but it was something else that did. Her two captors seemed equally confused as they scrambled to locate their superior. They had the advantage of height, a good vantage point, but the disarray made it difficult to locate a specific individual.

Emerald and cerulean blades erupted from their hilts in the distance. Jedi were present too.

"Why were you two at the coast? It would have been child's play to dispatch you both."

The troopers turned their helmets towards each other and seemed to pause at the thought.

"Save your breath, traitor, we will,-"

The ground shook as a hovertank down below took a shot at a walker, toppling it over. A smile crept over Alaisy's sharply lined eyes. The drums hammered within the song. The hand gripped her arm harder. She wanted to scold him for hurting her. Then a hole appeared in her captor's armor. His hand became stiff, before he toppled over. The sub-staff officer held his blaster up, barrel smoking, hands trembling. Electric-blue eyes bulged as he aimed the weapon at the Sith.

*And so it begins.*

Aphotis dropped herself backwards as he squeezed the trigger. Her heeled boot kicked at his arm. He held onto his rifle because of the rifle belt. Then her platform snapped open. A jet of fire engulfed the trooper's helmet and propelled the woman back. She flew into the dead trooper, pushing his body with her own, before deactivating the jet boots. The Force screamed at her as she scrambled to get up. She threw her long legs behind her and held up the cuffs, catching the blaster-bolt in the middle. It scorched her wrists, but her stun-cuffs fell apart into a hundred metal pieces as she completed a backwards roll. Two more shots were missed in the motion, burning the ground in front of her. Tir'eivra grit her teeth as she stretched out her free arms and willed the Force to toss the man off the edge with an invisible thrust to his abdomen. Another shot went wide as he yelled while plummeting to his death.

The Sith rubbed her wrists and peered down. The valley below was in utter chaos. Blasterfire. Lightsabers clashed. Explosions. Tanks keeled over. Those who tried to escape were cut and shot down mercilessly. They were boxed in. Then she saw it. A large man perched on the other side, axes held in both hands. The song was disturbed, like static. Any emotion would've normally let Tir'eivra in, but now it was either wary of her, or unable to be reached. Perhaps she could get Alla'su's whereabouts from this chain-mail armored commander.

It was unfortunate that she hadn't brought some electrobinoculars with her, but she could swear that she saw the shadows move. Antlers, manes of fur, headless creatures. There were caxquettes down there, waiting to pounce. Held back by a tight, invisible leash. Aphotis had to get to the canopy, past the front line where the group of Jedi held strong still. At least none of them seemed to match the description of Marick, or the others she had defended herself from earlier.

*No risk, no reward.*

Her lust for battle, and even pain spiked. What better opportunity than now to test her mettle against the wielders of the light side. They so cowardly hid behind the ranks of the Brotherhood, condescending, scuttling their progress. The Sith of old would have been revolted by the mere thought.

*Time to get a taste of history.*

The ramp that led downwards had been demolished by the heavy laser cannon. Aphotis reassembled her lightwhip and lightsaber, clipping both back onto her high-waisted belt. Thankfully no seawater had gotten in. She bent her knees, gathered speed in a sprint and leapt off the edge of the escarpment. Her jetboots activated and allowed her to land in the heat of battle with an elegant somersault. Being as tall as she was, she attracted attention even in the midst of chaos. It took assiduousness just to seek out a path through the battlefield with the many blaster bolts whistling by. Stressful, yet exhilarating. What she needed to do was get the big man's attention.

With a loud hiss, the black-clad woman pumped herself up to charge into the fray, heels and claw. Rock crunched and a cloud of dust rose up. A gallop developed into a full sprint as she held both of her vibronail-laden hands splayed open at her sides. Her thighs trembled as her weighted platforms stomped the ground. Her shiny tail stood up aggressively and her high ponytail fluttered in the wind like a warbanner. The first trooper was facing the wrong way as she jumped them from behind, slitting their neck. With a push off of their shoulder, Tir'eivra jumped to the next target using her remaining momentum. A burning pain went through her as a bolt glanced by her arm. She flipped herself over, and with a *crack*, planted a durasteel-bladed heel in another soldier's visor.

*No time to stop.*

Alaisy's next victims were a few paces away. She unclipped a thermal detonator from her high-waisted belt and activated it, tossing it right between them. It exploded on impact, sending their bodies careening as she burst through the smoke.

Two troopers ahead took notice of her, likely shaken by the impact of the blast. Aphotis launched herself at the front one who had just barely raised their rifle. A sudden jolt shook her. A flash of light reflected in her visor as her chest was set on fire. The soldier's finger had set off his weapon and she had punched through his armor. Rapid breathing and a chilling cold. Just pain and no heartbeat. The weak pulse nearly toppled her. She panicked as the trooper's body fell backwards.

Her living suit tightened around her body in an attempt to keep her blood pressure high enough. It gave her just enough time to jump from the dying man to the one ready to finish her off. Before he could raise his gun fully, she grabbed him by the throat and pushed him down.

The will to survive became almost feral. The dark side of the Force took over and summoned an immense thirst for life within her. Her claws batted away his rifle and helmet, then sank into his terror-stricken face. Wrinkles appeared and life ebbed away from him as he bled out of the vibronail cuts. Her immensely tough heart muscle was pulled over itself. Folding and folding, suturing itself, closing the hole that was spilling out blood.

Her heart began pumping again as vigor was siphoned away from the trooper. More tissue was grown at an exceedingly fast rate, like an out of control cancer sped up by a thousand times. The puncture in her chest grew back and her alchemical suit coiled itself back together with black tendrils. Tir'eivra grunted as the rending and tearing of flesh, muscle and skin pushed her way past the threshold of suffering.

*So close to death, yet again. Savor it.*

Short hisses of air escaped from her mask, a trail of destruction left behind her, she rested her hands on her legs. A pair of Jedi were surrounded by out of control cannon fodder, blasting

away at their lightsabers and massacring themselves in the process. The chanting madness from this supposed god must've been immensely powerful. But these Jedi posers needed to go, they were taking the spotlight away from her with their spectacle. Tir'eivra gritted her teeth and a wicked smile formed in her eyes. A claw reached for her Smart Pistol.

The Knight with the cerulean lightsaber seemed to notice it when she took aim. At least she managed to gain some attention, but this wasn't for them. The miniature laser tracking system tagged every single target, troopers and Force-wielders alike. With a gentle squeeze of the trigger she let loose a cascade of pellets until the clip was empty. One after one the shells detonated close to their victims, spilling out high-explosive micro-flechettes.

Some of them penetrated spaces between their armors before bursting into flames, blood and limbs. Others blew up in their faces, at the back of their heads, triggering grenades on belts. It was absolute mayhem. The Jedi facing Alaisy with his back dropped down in an unrecognizable pile of flesh and shredded robes, while his compatriot desperately kept up a bubble of energy for himself only. A few desperate limbs still spasmed after the massacre was complete, with the battle still raging around them on the battlefield.

A wicked, modulated laughter came from the tall Sith.

"You monster! What were you thinking?" The Jedi screamed out, his arms shaking as he stood there, holding his protective shield together.

Aphotis felt a gaze fall upon her, it burned in her neck. It was not the Knight before her. A battle-axe landed beside her.

"Hahahaha! Entertain me, Chichyiot, your Master, your God! Mortal enemies at each other's throats. As it should be!" The boisterous voice commanded, echoing over the entire valley through blaster-fire.

Tir'eivra tossed the pistol aside like a burned-out old toy and reached for her lightwhip with her claw.

"Looks like my audience with Alla'Su has become a possibility. Die well, Jedi!"

With a thunderous sonic boom, she cracked her lightwhip. A long crimson lash coiled in perpetual motion. Aphotis could feel the Cathar summoning his spell, attempting to control the black-clad Sith by invoking anger.

*No need, I have plenty of that stored up.*

Tir'eivra used the near-death experience from earlier to rally up vexation of her own, drinking from the hatred of those who attacked the caxquette's nests and herself in Ihausen and mixed-in

the malice of her *Garden of Trepidations* and all the downtrodden monsters she fought for. A frenzy burst out of the tall Sith woman in an aura of flames and brimstone.

The Jedi looked on, confused, afraid, hands trembling as he dropped his screen of protection and reached for his lightsaber hilt.

Aphotis held back Chichyiot's spell by singing her song of fire through the dark side of the Force, pushing her body further than she had ever done before.

"The Force shall free me!" Tir'eivra screamed out as she stomped forward with a heavy boot.

Chicyiot laughed, holding his arms crossed. He respected the display of power.

The Jedi, however, was doomed...