

Prompt #3: Not This Time

Chrai Dewal was new at this. For less than a year, she had been attempting to grow accustomed to use the Force. She had been attempting to become acquainted with Plagueis despite the fact that she seemed to arrive at the most inopportune time. She had been attempting to find some fun and joy in attempting to infiltrate the enormous flagships that had allegedly been seized by enemy forces. It was almost foreign to her. She had stowed away on yachts, cruisers, fighters, even naval ships, but this was different. This was borderline insane.

And now she was shackled to a chair – by Force shackles, no less – rendering her incapable of flying into a tempting rage and demolishing everything in the tiny quarters that she had been locked up in on the *Ascendant*. Yep. Definitely new to this.

Chrai had never enjoyed feeling like a rookie, but that was what she was right now. Put her in a bounty hunter job, and she was golden, smooth sailing, all the clichéd phrases that made her look like a typical BAMF. But a Dark Jedi captured by another Dark Jedi after trying to help other Dark Jedi in this awkward organization of Dark Jedi that never seemed to implode on itself? She had wanted a 101 class for this. This was ridiculous.

*Maybe if I had stopped by the Shadow Academy*, she thought to herself, wincing as the Force shackles seemed to burn into the exposed, puckered skin of her chafed wrists, *this would be easier*. Not that Ronovi would've appreciated that. The Academy had justifiably become a sore spot in her mind. Tends to happen when you attempt to blow it up and then get fired later for it.

The doors to the quarters suddenly slid open, and two robed, diminutive figures scurried in, flanking the corners of the room as if their prisoner would magically soar into the air and fly out of their sight unharmed. Chrai bit her already bruised lip. She felt naked without her token black hat. Untamed tufts of red hair rose in random spurts along her head. Her tunic was damp with sour perspiration. Her ankles, also bound, felt swollen and achy beneath her heavy boots. She was ready to use her back-up weapon on these bastards – the gift of the gab, as some people called it – when the man of the hour arrived, his hands behind his back as his uniform jacket threatened to become undone from its tight belt.

“Xander Drax, I assume?” Chrai heard herself ask before an almost involuntary laugh crackled from her mouth. “To whom do I owe the honor? Is there dinner after this?”

Drax said nothing, only nodding to his henchmen before they left the two of them alone. As the doors hissed shut behind him, Chrai could feel an unwanted bead of sweat stretch into a trickle along her scarred jawline. More so than pain, and more so than exhaustion, she felt irritation. Not quite fury yet – she was sure she would get to that point in less than ten minutes from now – but it was enough to eat at her, like a Corellian whiskey that burned too much on the way down her gullet. Only when some silence had passed between them did the old man, his face hideously gaunt beneath his fragile beard, smile.

“I didn't expect someone like you to try so boldly to interfere with me,” he said, his voice thin yet still oddly powerful. “Yet, here we are.”

Chrai sneered back. “Yep. Here we are.”

“Nothing else to say?”

“I try to keep my verbal arsenal filled and well-equipped, if you catch my drift,” retorted Chrai. “Don’t like wasting my breath on people who don’t deserve it.”

Drax’s smile faded and he began to pace. Chrai wondered if he was clicking his boots that loudly on the steel floor just to spite her. Was this some sort of rudimentary torture method? Some aural or auditory trick to set her brain on fire? Much to her dismay, it was working. The irritation was mutating in her stomach. A different beast was brewing.

“Tell me, Dewal,” Drax murmured, and he seemed to take delight in the way his prisoner’s body stiffened, “how long has your allegiance lasted with Plagueis? Two months? A month? A week?”

“I have allies here.”

“Fortea, I understand, is one of them.” Drax chuckled as Chrai felt her face grow white. *Are you kidding me? He can read me like a damn datapad.* “And where is he? I don’t suppose he’s been much help.”

“I came here on my own.”

“I see.” He clicked his tongue. “I’m only asking because of what I sense from you. I detect some urgency from you, some amateurism. You are not accustomed to this sort of life. And mark my words, it will be your life, if you make the wrong decision. Flying on ships for the rest of your days. Subservient to certain men and women who are guaranteed to make your existence nightmarish if you don’t cater to their whims.”

“I’ve done that before.”

“Correction,” the Dark Jedi cut in. “You’ve *chosen* the people to be subservient to, for a price. You think I haven’t heard of you before, Dewal? I don’t just need to read your mind. Several of my allies have heard your name across the galaxy. A recalcitrant bounty hunter. Eager to pave your own way to success...”

“No, no. Stop. Let me guess.” Chrai cleared her throat and lowered the octave of her voice, a sad attempt to mimick Xander Drax’s rasp. “‘And now you’ve come to a place where they’ll slap a muzzle on you, try to train you to be their lapdog.’ Or slave. Or something similar? Am I wrong?”

Drax’s blank expression in response to this was enough to make Chrai laugh, really laugh. Despite the situation, this banter was turning out to be a little fun. She, of course, knew exactly what the guy was trying to do. Sowing seeds of doubt into one’s choices of friends was not new to her; in fact, she had done plenty of that herself with her clients’ targets or her clients themselves. As long as Drax didn’t attempt to press her more sensitive buttons, this interrogation was to go nowhere, nor his brazen yet sad attempt to convert her to his side. She knew what he was up to.

“You are far more intelligent than you’ve let on,” Drax intoned. *Oh, for Pete’s sake. I really can’t let him scan my thoughts like that.* “Yet you’re still wide open to me. Like a raw wound, oozing out secrets. You think I need to torture you, sweet talk you, into getting what I want? No, all that’s left is to prod your connections. I’ve met your loved ones before.”

Chrai’s mouth, for the first time that day, went dry. Usually she was good at moistening her tongue, so the barbed words slipped out more easily, more fluidly. She tried to shut off her mind, break all ties to the universe and people outside, empty her skull of anything that Drax might use against her. But everything was going too fast, and she had a sinking suspicion that he had already gotten what he wanted out of her.

“There was another woman,” Drax began, “like you, who I almost got on my side. She would have been a powerful ally. Very, very powerful. The Brotherhood killed her before I could snatch her up. Imagine that. The very group you once hated, that you blamed for the woman’s death, now you are aligned with them. And scowling at the very man who attempted to give her a new chance at power...”

“You fucker.”

“I knew Tavisæn, Dewal, more than you can ever imagine,” Drax continued, grinning as Chrai struggled, for once, to speak. “And I know how much she cared about you. Oh, but to a fault, I’m sure. All the baggage must be cleared out to forge a new path, my dear. Surely you understand that.”

“Don’t talk about Ronovi.”

Drax paused, arching an eyebrow. “Beg pardon?”

The saliva was back, and turning into foam in Chrai’s mouth. She leaned forward in her chair as much as she could, despite the strains of the Force shackles. “Don’t. Fucking. Talk about Ronovi. You have no right.”

There. Now it was out there, and the irritation in her belly was no longer anything resembling mere irritation. Chrai was angry. Very, very angry. And as someone in another dimension or galaxy might have said to someone else, no one was going to like her when she was angry.

Xander Drax, for the first time in those ten minutes, moved his hands away from his back and held them up as if apologetically. “Ah, but of course. A sweet spot for you, dear girl. My apologies. Perhaps this conversation should – ”

He was interrupted by the crunching of pulverized metal – or more accurately, metal doors caving into folded, indiscernible wads - as recognizable Plagueian soldiers burst onto the scene. This was too good, almost cinematic. Chrai knew there must be a Force sensitive among them, because the shackles unlocked and fell away like water from her wrists and ankles, leaving her free. Her first action after being uncuffed was to lift the heavy chair in both hands, approach a disoriented Drax, and unleash a primal howl as she slammed the thing down across his head, reveling in the sound of his skull potentially cracking beneath the weight. He dropped like a rock, sprawled on his back as blood began to seep from his ears.

Chrai straightened, hyperventilating, the chair slippery in her damp hands. The soldiers congregated around her, checking her for injuries. Not much was there, save for some dried blood on her lip and some contusions from the previous altercations she had had with enemy forces before being dragged into these hellhole quarters. One of those surrounding her pulled away the hood covering his or her face. No, no. Her face. Her dark hair shone in the thin light of the space.

“Selika.” Chrai could feel her temper subside, her anger dissipate. She set down the chair and leaned against it, as if she were posing for everyone. She was consumed by another feeling entirely while surveying the glorious body of her Quaestor. “My hero.”

Selika did not flinch. “You have five minutes to find your weapons and meet me in the hangar bay,” she said. “The Consul is already enroute. Drax’s control of the *Ascendant* has been compromised.”

“Well, glad to be of service,” Chrai smiled, looking down at the old man’s crumpled body before looking back at Selika and ignoring the heat growing between her thighs. “Do I at least get to say goodbye and good luck before you abandon me?”

Again, no response. Typical Selika. Never one to entertain Chrai's flirtations unless they became useful to her. She nodded to a handful of the soldiers, who moved to flank Chrai as if under her command. Chrai found some amusement in having a posse. Drax had been way off. This Brotherhood gig may not have been so bad after all.

"Well, gentlemen," she announced, pointing toward the gaping maw of torn metal that not signified their exit, "shall we get my guns back?"