

Keira Viru #11708
HUTTS LOST CARGO ON HOTH Entry

Frozen Spice And Everything Not So Nice



"The air hurts my face," Keira muttered. The Quaestor of Shar Dakhan raised an arm to block her face from the harsh wind, pulling the fur-rimmed hood of her thermal jacket tighter around her face with her free hand. The survival gear was a departure from her usual attire but far more suitable to the climate of Hoth, which she was very much thankful for as another vicious gust bit at her bright red cheeks. "Why did I come to a planet where the air hurts my face?"

Keira collapsed from her crouch and threw her back against the snow bank, safe for the moment from the unrelenting wind. The sky looked impossibly blue from her vantage point, and for once her sensitive gaze was fully shielded from the light's painful embrace through the orange filter of her goggles. *Maybe I should just lay here until it calms down a bit*, the half-Umbaran thought to herself.

As if in answer to her unasked question, the wind roared to life once more and lifted the fresh snow upon the ground into an angry flurry. "Well, kriff you too!" she shouted, her words losing their strength within the gust. Keira inhaled and let out an exasperated breath that came out like a wispy cloud, only to be lost to the wind. She raised her scarf over her mouth once more before rising to her knees and turning to look over the snowbank once more, albeit with less visibility this time around.

She only had herself to blame for her current predicament, truth be told. When the intelligence operatives of the Sadow Warhost had finished cleaning up the scrambled transmission, Keira was the first to volunteer. To start — from what the Quaestor had gathered in her readings — it was never a bad thing to have a Hutt owe you for something. Well, if you weren't hung up on the whole 'legal' thing... which she wasn't. Couple that with the fact that she had never been to the Hoth system, and you had yourself a recipe for a 'done deal' with the Quaestor. It would seem she wasn't alone in that, though her motivations weren't quite in line as those who had arrived before her.

The Seer had been careful, trusting the Warhost pilot with the task of landing undetected. Unfortunately, that had the side effect of requiring her to travel the rest of the way on foot. A side effect that she was very much regretting with every fiber of her frigid, shaking being. A steaming sauna, a warm bath, and a hot cup of caf. These were the words of the mantra that drove her onward despite the harsh conditions.

She had been lucky so far, having managed to spot a group of Talz hunters early on. They had been tracking a Wampa, the hunter becoming the hunted in a turn of irony that was not lost upon the Gray Jedi, and were easy enough to avoid as a result. Unfortunately, the other recipients of survivor's message — the Hutts being the supposed owners of *The Shiny Luck's* cargo — had been able to respond far quicker than she had. Which was understandable, all

things considered, as it seemed that the abandoned Rebel hideout, Echo Base, wasn't so abandoned anymore.

"Mandalorians," Keira murmured into the fabric of her scarf, not without a hint of disdain.

Their markings were evident upon the banners that had been placed to mark the territory around the base. They certainly weren't hiding, and who would all the way out in such a remote system, and that made the Quaestor's life just a bit easier. Considering *The Shiny Luck* crashed nearby, it was logical to assume the Mandos were the ones that had taken it down. Which meant the survivor was probably already dead, or held captive within the base as a potential bartering chip. So that meant that Echo Base was exactly where Keira needed to go. Just great.

Keira reached down into the calm pool at her core, opening herself to her power's soothing caress as it rushed through her limbs like liquid fire. The blinding snow flurry whipping around her slowed as her perception of the world came into sharp focus. With preternatural grace, the Seer hopped over the snowbank and broke out into a sprint. The fresh snow shifted beneath each long step but she found her footing regardless, long ago having grown accustomed to uneven terrain. Within the span of several breaths she moved from the bank to the nearest entrance, the world snapping back to full speed as she threw her back against the side of the doorway and relinquished her grip on her power.

The Quaestor pushed out with her senses, tendrils of awareness snaking through the door and into the corridor beyond. *Nothing*, she thought with a grin, *how fortunate for me*. Keira slipped into the dark opening and crouched low. Safe from the howling winds outside, the half-breed reached up and pulled down her scarf and goggles, letting them both hang around her neck. "If I were a captive, where would I be?" she questioned no one in particular.

The corridors of the once Rebel base were relatively simple for Keira to navigate, her Force awareness allowing her to travel relatively unseen as she avoided the patrols. Her mind had wasted little time working through the angles, settling on following one of the patrolmen towards what she hoped would be their rec hall. The first lure she had hooked failed her, as he seemed to be in the middle of his patrol, but the Seer struck gold with her second attempt. She stood pressed against the side of the corridor just outside the small barracks, focusing on the even flow of her breathing. From what she could tell, there were only three men within, but she knew there were no guarantees in life.

At least not hers.

"Your Sabacc face is terrible, Koda," a voice stated from within. "You want to just hand me the credits and save the embarrassment?"

"Just play your hand, *Shebs*," another responded.

"Tsk tsk, such hostility between you two," the third said followed by the sound of cards in motion. "Yes, that's a *Pure Sabacc*. I'll be taking that pot."

An audible groan came from the first voice. "That's just great... Too bad I've got an *Idiot's Array*," said the second voice.

"Kriffing hell!" the other two exclaimed, though whether it was in regards to the rarity of their fellow's hand or the fact that Keira had chosen that moment to make her entrance would remain unanswered.

Unfortunately for them, the Seer was already lost in the grip of her power before they even had time to react. She raised her right hand and the pair facing her were lifted into the air by their throats, a sickening gurgle escaping from their gaping mouths as they scratched at their throats futilely and kicked their legs in desperation. She tilted her head as a smirk spread across her pale lips, as if amused by their predicament for an instant before gesturing to the side dismissively. The pair of Mandalorians crashed into the nearby wall, the small space allowing for them to hit with enough force to be knocked unconscious. The third was already on his feet with his blaster at hand as he spun about to unleash a flurry of shots at his attacker.

Keira shifted down and to the side, feeling the heat of the shots as the bolts of plasma screeched just over her shoulder as she deked past. She closed the distance between them with two easy steps that came as a blur to her opponent. The Seer slipped past him and grabbed a handful of hair, turning his head awkwardly to face her as she raised her other hand up to his eye level with sparks of power shifting between her fingertips. "You seem nice," Keira murmured through a tight smile, "you wouldn't happen to know where I can find your captive now would you?"

Luck, it would seem, had not entirely abandoned the Quaestor. Through a stroke of fortune, the rather informative — under the right motivation — Mandalorian she had talked to hadn't alerted the base to her presence with his blaster shots. Furthermore, he had given her quite specific directions that had taken her to the brig. A grin was still obvious upon the Quaestor's face as she brushed her bangs to the side under her hood. The Mandos were so confident in their seclusion that they hadn't bothered with more than a minimum effort in guarding their captive — which meant there was only one guard to handle.

Keira stood at the end of the corridor, doing a mental head count. It seemed that she was definitely later to the party than she expected, as there were occupants for more than a few of the cells. The guard was positioned just outside what appeared to be the survivor's cell, a deduction she had made based on his voice matching the one that had been heard in the initial message. Albeit with less static and what not.

Taking a deep breath, the Seer leaned around the corridor and reached a metaphysical hand into the mind of the Mandalorian guard. She focused on that grip, willing the woman to see only what Keira wanted her to. Once she was confident in her grasp, the Quaestor simply stepped out into the corridor and walked towards the cells with an almost casual nonchalance. As she passed the guard she gave a quick wave, a casual roll of her fingers, and then spun about to lean against the cell door. "I take it you're the one who sent out the call?" she asked while leaning her head back to look through the bars.

"Yes I am, that is, I'm—" he replied.

"Nu-uh, no names," Keira interrupted. "Ready to go?"

One of the occupants of the other cells rose to the bars, staring at the Seer with wide eyes. "Hey, if you're grabbing him, why not let us out too? We got our own ships—"

"Excuse me, mommy and daddy are talking," she snapped with a glare to the smuggler before glancing back at the former Crewman of *The Shiny Luck*.

"Um, yes, right... Why can't she see you?" he asked.

"Bad prescription?" she responded dryly.

With a sigh, she reached out and tapped the Mando's shoulder, watching as the woman turned in confusion. She approached the cell and looked right at its occupant without a flicker of recognition. She leaned forward and glanced left and right, cursing under her breath.

Keira stepped to the side and whispered to the survivor, "you might want to move."

The man barely managed to shift away before the guard opened the cell and rushed in, searching frantically for the occupant. The Quaestor wasted no time and pivoted back towards the opening, thrusting a hand out to direct a surge of power through it. The telekinetic wave concussed against the Mandalorian's back and sent them head first into the wall and falling limply to the ground. Keira then motioned for the survivor to follow. "Waiting for a red carpet?" she murmured as she started on without him.

As the man caught up to her at the end of the corridor, Keira glanced back and stopped him in place with a glare. "This 'precious cargo' of yours... you know where they took it?" she asked.

"Fortunately, yes. I saw them prepping it in the hangar to load onto their shuttle for transport when they dragged me in here," the survivor replied.

Keira performed a mental cartwheel but focused on keeping her face impassive. "That's rather helpful of them. Let's go," the Seer said.

Without awaiting further comment from her tag along, the Quaestor took off down the corridor at a brisk pace. She pushed her senses outward once more in order to move freely without any unexpected encounters. While Keira was confident in her own abilities, she wasn't so certain her follower would get out unscathed. No doubt the Hutts cared more about the cargo than the life of a single man, however Keira was painfully aware she couldn't fly so much as a speeder. Like it or not, she needed the man whose name she refused to learn.

They managed to make it to the hangar unhindered, coming out of the corridor close to the transport shuttles themselves. With a motion of her hand she directed the man forward, crouching low behind the crates. He took his queue and moved quickly from cover to cover, trying to keep out of sight. Keira followed quickly once she saw him board the waiting transport.

She was two steps from relative safety when the ship's thrusters roared to life and echoed throughout the hangar. It wasn't the Force sending her skin crawling up the back of her neck in response, no... it was just old fashioned self-preservation.

"There! Blast her!"

Gritting her teeth, the Quaestor spun about and threw up her hands protectively. A thin membrane of power expanded outward in response to her will, providing a barrier for the Mandalorian's blaster fire to crash against. "Close the kriffing ramp!" she shouted over her shoulder towards the cockpit.

"Right, sorry!" the flustered man called back.

The Seer dropped to one knee, minimizing her targetting profile so she didn't have to rely entirely on the barrier. It seemed like an eternity before the ramp started moving, slowly hissing closed as sparks and plasma streaked around her. She let out a breath that she hadn't even realized she had been holding, her body suddenly feeling heavy from her mental exertion. Growling under her breath, Keira spun around and jogged into the cockpit. "Why are we not, you know, flying?" she asked.

"The cargo arm won't retract," he responded with a hint of desperation in his voice.

"What, I have to do everything?" the Seer nearly screamed in frustration. She spun about and travelled the short distance back into the main body of the transport, her eyes affixed to the open side panel the cargo had been loaded onto. She grit her teeth and threw out both of her arms, closing her fingers tightly as if grabbing hold of the air. With a grunt of frustration she began pulling back hard, struggling against an unseen force. With a high-pitched squeal, the cargo arm finally gave way and succumbed to the application of the Quaestor's will upon it. Once closed, the half-breed fell to her knees with a loud clang that reverberated within the confined space.

She pulled back her hood and stared towards the ceiling, breathing hard as she wiped her forearm across her brow, sweat sticking to the sleeve of her jacket. "How 'bout now?" she called towards the cockpit between panting breaths.

"We're good," came his reply.

"Awesome, great..." she muttered as she leaned back against the durasteel panels. "Get us to Nal Hutta, and I expect you to buy me a drink."

The Quaestor reached into the pouch at her side and pulled out her secure communicator, flicking the device on and keying in the frequency for the shuttle she had arrived in. "My Lord?" came the staccato voice through the device's speaker.

"We're en route to Nal Hutta," Keira said with a sigh, "let Rix know we've secured the package, and the survivor... if that slug even cares."

"Right away, my Lord."

The Seer clicked off the device and let it fall to the ground, focusing on the vibrations of the ship as it worked through Hoth's atmosphere. *I could use a nap*, she mused quietly as she tried to focus on nothing at all.