



SUBMITTED IN ENTRY TO MONSTROSITY COMPETITION:
THIS ISN'T WHERE I PARKED MY CAR

Live Sampling

Author:

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NOTE: This is a direct follow on from the opening fiction's reference to Elinia's location, rather than strictly adhering to the prompt to maintain character continuity and consistency.

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1 Prelude

From as far as the lead scientist's office, the stench of the warped bodies was overpowering. Previously pristine, white, sterile, the lab was usually used as a final testing stage for conclusions and methods dreamt up by its resident mathematicians and theoretical scientists. If the theory is strong enough, less experimentation is needed. The strategy had fallen apart in spectacular fashion in a matter of hours.

Body bags littered the floor. The scientists, protected from exposure from head to toe, faced an impossible battle to clean against the spreading bodily fluid and fungal growths. It was unknown if this fungus was contagious, the . The latest sample lay across a desk, surrounded by a team of research associates. Even here, in Scholae Palatinae's research lab, a lab built for military research, the sight was sickening. The body could have been any near-human species, all traces of its previous identity had been hideously transformed. The skin was brown and scaly, the limbs twisted and warped, the forehead and face destroyed by the growth of a horrific maw-like fungus.

There was an unusual sense of haste in the lab more used to working under a more controlled time frame. None had ever faced these fungal growths before, but results were expected regardless. An array of chemicals, an assortment of colours, viscosities, a mix of medicine and poison were assorted across a long table that stretched across the lab, a picture not unlike an exotic chef's ingredients' shelf. The mission: to cure or to kill. It didn't matter which, as long as the final result was to be rid of these creatures. The growths over the skin were extremely resilient to damage. There had been reports of the Monstrosities shrugging off blaster fire, explosive damage, the resilience of the hardened skin to conventional weaponry had already been established by the lab. Adding to the list of resistances, all but the most powerful acid seemed to just harmlessly flow off the surface of the skin like water over stone.

Trained more in theory than experimentation, it was unusual for Elinia to be spending this much time in the lab, overseeing experiments she would usually leave to her associates, but as her reputation grew, along did admiration for her accomplishments, so did the demand for her work, and she found herself delving into areas in which she had little personal expertise. Experiments on dead bodies and tissue samples had never been one of them, she preferred to go straight from her theories to implementation, but no-one had ever captured one of these Monstrosities alive, her hand had been forced, but progress was slow. The dead bodies of the so called Monstrosities appeared to have little

experimental value.

The problem was an interesting one from an academic point of view, such a fungus was entirely unknown to the galaxy. It was rare that a scientist had the opportunity to work in such an environment that every result is a new one, but in the circumstances, academic interest had to come second to finding a way to stop these monsters. Holovids of a Monstrosity ripping a civilian in half while under fire had been circulated widely to the team by the Imperial top brass, among thinly veiled threats over timescales. Elinicia checked back at the time and date - it had been twenty-four hours since the outbreak.

Away from the chaos but not away from the stench, in the confines of her office overlooking the mountains of Judecca, Elinicia searched through pages and pages of information on the holonet on various fungi throughout the known galaxy. Glow Fungus... Turranean Flesh Fungus... Klol Fungus... she scanned every source she could, trying to find anything remotely similar to the Monstrosities' affliction. After reading about a flesh eating mould from the rainforests of Nim Drovis, Dr. Rei decided the time for inaction was over.

2 Shipwrecked

Elinicia left her office for the lab. The smell became stronger and stronger with every step. "Leeda," she said strongly to her best student, a young human female that shared her approach to research. "You're in charge of the lab for now, I'm going down to Ohmen."

"You're going down there?" Leeda responded with a shocked tone.

"I'll be fine," Elinicia responded reassuringly as she collected a few vials of poisons, acids and medicines for her journey. "I'm always fine." Many of her colleagues thought she was crazy for how calm she was going into dangerous places, not aware their lead scientist was one of the most dangerous assassins in the system. After abandoning her protective gear for her more familiar murky-white labcoat, she made for the spaceport, passing the ubiquitous Pete from Sales along the way.

Her usual ship was waiting for her, a standard issue civilian family transport ship that she used to travel while attracting minimal attention. Even while on sensitive missions, Elinicia always picked the civilian craft, and opted for the least suspicious route in. She was well familiarised with the ten minute journey down the mountainside, having travelled to

the same streets of Ohmen mere days prior on a wild goose chase to join the Inquisitorius.

Unable to pilot a ship herself, Elincia left control to the autopilot after programming in a set of coordinates near the outbreak zone. She ran over numerous possibilities in her mind, trying to think up some concoction of chemicals that might be useful to her. Seeing the holovids were useful, but it was impossible to truly get a good understanding of the Monstrosities without seeing them first hand.

As the craft drew closer she got a first hand look at a Monstrosity for the first time. The high pitched screaming of blaster bolts grew to a crescendo. A hulking beast no less than two metres tall, the beast looked like something out of a nightmare as it engaged in battle with a small team of Imperial troops, shearing a heavily armoured soldier in half just as in the video.

Mere seconds before landing, the craft shook. There was an explosion from the back side. Elincia braced for impact as the ship dropped to the ground with a loud thud, hit by a stray blaster bolt. She had escaped unharmed, but the ship clearly wasn't going to fly again. Hearing the sounds of a fire beginning to break out at the back of the ship, Elincia escaped immediately, mindful of the combustible nature of half the materials she carried with her. The blaster bolts had finished. The entire team lay in a growing pool of blood, a mess of severed limbs and broken bodies. The Monstrosity seemed to have fled, perhaps confused by the crash.

3 Alone

Elincia was alone. She had no weapon, and no transport. The streets were eerily empty despite the ongoing battles in the vicinity. Once a commercial hub of the region, the district looked like the site of a war zone. Shops had been looted in the aftermath of the evacuation.

She stayed low, staying within the shadows as she explored the local area, moving silently towards the nearest sounds. She needed to observe these creatures in more detail, she had no idea how they operated. Did they sense by sight? By sound? Echolocation? There were many questions that Elincia needed to answer before formulating a plan of action, but the situation was more dire than she had anticipated. The streets of Ohmen were ruined, partly by the battle between Imperial soldiers and Monstrosities, but also by the opportunistic looting of shops, especially those selling high value goods.

The tell-tale sounds of battle, blaster bolts, battle cries, screams of pain, grew louder and louder as Elinicia reached a turn in the street. She silently crept towards the street corner. Pressing herself against the wall of a looted toy store, near to a smashed window, she peered around the corner.

The scenes in front of her were as brutal and bloody as the one before. Four Imperial troops, aided by a figure in a black cloak with a red lightsaber, were locked in battle with one of the Monstrosities. Blaster bolts harmlessly glanced off the hardened, mutated skin. The Sith was unskilled in his use of the lightsaber, Elinicia guessed he had only just learned to use one, and was unable to get close to the hulking beast in front of him.

The Monstrosity swung huge, powerful arms, seemingly with little direction, but the power to kill in one blow, almost always in the direction of the last Imperial to attack. Elinicia observed closely. The creature seemed to rely on sound more than sight. She wasn't even sure if it had functional eyes. One by one the team fell, arms severed, heads dismembered, the Sith torn apart in a fashion that had become all too common a sight.

The Monstrosity continued to rip apart the fallen soldiers, but Elinicia needed a weapon, and the situation gave her an opportunity. He would need to be careful using it in front of anyone else, but at least she could obtain a weapon she knew how to use. Reaching out with the Force, Elinicia called the fallen Sith's lightsaber to her hand. An armory design. He hadn't even been knighted. Briefly, she remembered the time when he wouldn't have even had a lightsaber until he was ready to use it effectively. She sparked the crimson blade into life with a snap-hiss. The last red lightsaber she used was Eludajae's.

Immediately, the Monstrosity charged towards her location, attracted by the lightsaber's sound. Unwilling to get close, Elinicia threw the activated lightsaber at the charging beast. A brown scaly arm swiped at the sound of the weapon's flight towards it. The forearm connected solidly with the lightsaber hilt, sending the weapon flying across the street as it continued its pursuit of Elinicia. *Motor reflexes are good* she thought to herself, before diving through the nearest smashed window for cover.

4 Unreciprocated Love

She landed with a soft roll on the inside. She was in a large toy store. This was not a part of Judeccan culture that she ever foresaw herself becoming involved with. The Monstrosity heard her enter and followed, clambering through the window, unaffected by the sharp fragments of glass. There was no blood. Another mental note: *resistant to cuts*.

Elincia crept silently around the store as the mutant smashed everything in range. She was in luck, as a shelf fell over, causing a tremendous noise exacerbated by the activation of various childrens' toys. A small fluffy animal attempted to say "I love you" as it was pummelled into the ground by a fist as hard as rock. As the Monstrosity mashed cuddly toys with unbridled ferocity, Elincia had moved to an entirely different part of the store.

She had managed to locate a water gun, the closest thing she had found with any possibility of being useful. Their skin was hard as rock, Elincia remembered an old game she used to play back on Ryloth, where water was good against rock. *Could water be their weakness?* Elincia took aim and unloaded the whole cannister of water, launching a powerful stream of water on the unsuspecting Monstrosity. Nothing happened. It was worth a try, but regardless, her new weapon was of more use empty than full.

The beast turned towards her, identifying the source of the attack. Focused this time, perhaps aware that it had been tricked, it smashed everything in its path, making a straight line towards Elincia's location. She jumped out of the way of a vicious punch aimed at her direction, but the beast heard her footwork and launched another attack. Elincia jumped back, calling upon the Force once more, the entire building descended into deep blackness. The mutant continued in its pursuit, seemingly unaffected by the lack of light. Elincia almost tripped over a fallen shelf, immediately dropping her veil of darkness, having confirmed they can function just as effectively in zero light.

She needed to buy herself some time. Thinking fast, the scientist picked up as many items as she could, and threw them to the other side of the store as hard as she could. Action figures, computer toys, it didn't matter what, as long as it made a sound to confuse the beast. Careful of her footwork, moving as silently as possible, she continued to make noise on the far side of the store by reaching out with the Force to knock down a shelf.

She looked at the floor around her. A chemistry set. Complete with a fire lighter. Ideas flooded the scientist's mind. She crouched down to the floor, preparing as silently as she could as she poured a deadly cocktail of chemicals into the water gun.

Elinicia lit the lighter, causing a small flame to shoot upwards, exactly what she needed. Calling upon the Force once more, concentrating with all her mind, she held the lighter still with an invisible hand. She took aim with the water gun, took a deep breath, and fired.

The store was bathed in a bright orange glow and the roar of fire. The combustible liquid burst into an inferno as it passed through the flame of the lighter, sending a stream of fire cascading down onto the Monstrosity. The hideous creature roared in pain as the flamed burned away at its scaly flesh. The fire began to spread, setting parts of the store on fire. It was time to leave. Elinicia threw the water gun at the Monstrosity before sprinting out of the store. The remaining ammunition exploded with a deafening blast, obliterating a large corner of the store.

Back out on the streets, and fully aware that her improvised flamethrower / explosive combination would have alerted half the city, she quickly located a fallen soldier from the Monstrosity's last battle. Finding a commlink, she reported the fate of the squadron, reported on the battle in the Toy Store and called for immediate evacuation.

Fire. The answer was fire