**Outer Rim Territories**

**Sertar Sector**

**Florrum**

The readings sped along the bottom of the view as the macro binoculars scanned the horizon, the green hue of the lenses picking out individual rocks, outcroppings and the occasional creature. As it swept, it centred on the brief flash of a sniper rifle sight atop one of the cliffs surrounding the area. This pass was narrow, and anyone straying into the area was quickly picked off by the sniper behind the gun.

Taranae lowered the binoculars and shielded her eyes from the glare of the sun. The temperature was soaring now, and if her team didn’t move soon, they may die of thirst. Their water rations were dwindling quickly, but between their target and their current location, they were pinned. It had fallen to them to clear the way to the primary objective by traversing this narrow canyon and meeting any resistance head-on. Unfortunately they were now at a stalemate as their weapons could not reach the lone gunman above the cliffs, and their current position put them out of range of his rather accurate sights. The team had already been cut by a total of four due to some thinking they could either outrun a projectile or some other bizarre notion of an idea. Now the responsibility of the task belonged to the Aedile of House Ajunta Pall. She needed to put her brain into gear and find a way around this mess. Looking around her, she could see her team was not faring well. Most were beginning to dehydrate, and the wind regularly whipped up dust and sand, blurring their vision. The canyon top had to be frequently spied upon to ensure they kept a bead on their enemy’s location.

Reaching back behind her head, Taranae grabbed the hood of her cloak and pulled it over her hair which was fast becoming stuck to her forehead and face. At least it gave her some protection from the sweltering heat and avoided the added trouble of sunstroke. The sniper must have known what would happen if he trapped them in this narrow confine and he seemed happy enough to wait and let them die of thirst. As she thought about this, the sith's eyes narrowed and she resolved to find a speedy resolution to the situation. Sighing, she raised the binoculars to her eyes and scanned to top of the steep canyon walls. It seemed her quarry had moved position again, but after a sweep of the plateau she spotted him, kneeling this time. How she wished she had a team member who had a long range weapon. One shot would be all it took to allow them to carry on to complete their objective, but alas, they had nothing that could match the range of the sniper rifle. Dropping her gaze lower, her peripheral vision caught a small red flash below the cliff face. She took her eyes from the macros and blinked, rubbing her eyes. The flash had been small and she needed her vision at its best to be able to see what it might be. She looked again, her vision scanning the chasm wall and stopped as she saw the telltale flash once more. Pushing a button on the side of the binoculars, she magnified and locked the view on the flashing red light. She gasped in surprise as she quickly made out a small cache of explosives that seemed to be buried into the wall of the canyon itself. She felt the elation flow over her as she realised that they were closer to their goal than they thought they had been. It seemed that the previous team sent here had at least managed to fulfil one of their tasks and had managed to get someone forward to plant the explosives before they were taken down by one accurate shot to the head. Scanning around further, she spotted a lone corpse near the pile, obviously the man who had been sent to prime the package for detonation.

She began to wrack her brains for the best way to activate the explosives. She knew that the weapons they had did not have the range needed and anyone sent to activate the switch would be dead within a few yards. The options were extremely limited until she saw a sight which actually made her smile. A short distance away from her, one of the soldiers was ranting as a small creature bounded away with his last rations. She giggled as it climbed one of the nearby boulders and began to eat it, as the offended soldier picked up his weapon and took aim on the animal as it stuffed the entire food package into its mouth at once. Taranae gestured at the soldier and his weapon rose from his hands, spinning all the way around and pointing directly at his face.

“I need that thing alive,” she shouted to him as hi mouth gaped, a small puddle spreading underneath him. “Don’t you dare destroy our only chance of a way out of here.” There was a click from the blaster and the magazine unloaded itself onto the floor as the main fainted from fear.

“Honestly, you don’t seem to be able to get the staff these days,” she sighed as the weapon dropped to the floor and soldiers dove for cover. She locked eyes with the creature as her research on the planet sped through her mind. What was this strange animal? The information flashed into her mind as she thought; a Kowakian monkey-lizard, if her memory was correct. A species that was not native to the planet, but had immigrated here. She motioned to a couple of her soldiers and as they stood from their cover, fearful of any reprisal for being cowardly, she barked orders.

“When I say,” she shouted to one, “you head over to the base of that wall like your ass was on fire! There are explosives there. Hit that switch and run like hell!”

“Yes Ma’am!” came the reply, as he took up position, ready to run. The others looked at her with disbelief on their faces as she concentrated on the creature. It gazed at her and cocked its head to the side as if listening to her, chattered and scampered off across the barren waste ground. If all went according to plan, the enemy would pay a small animal no heed. As everyone watched, Taranae guided the monkey-lizard with her mind, ending it to the bottom of the sheer rock face. It halted there, turned and looked at her with its head to one side and began to climb. The nimbleness of the animal astounded her as it wended its way towards the unsuspecting sniper above. The Aedile raised her hand, a signal for the runner to ready himself. The tension in his body changed and sweat ran in rivulets down his face as he waited for the hand to drop.

The Kowakian reached its destination and hopped onto the plateau above the canyon. It searched this way and that before spotting the gunman laid on his chest with his rifle trained on the insurgents. Immediately it made its way towards him, keeping as quiet as it could with Taranae concentrating on it all the while. Sensing something, the sniper glanced to his left just in time to spot the creature hop atop a boulder beside him. He gave a small smile as he returned to his vigil as he uttered the words; “Stupid animals.”

Taranae’s arm dropped. “Go!” he hissed through her clenched teeth. Her power was waning and she knew not how much longer she could keep up the link with her small, ugly friend. The soldier leapt forward over a boulder and ran at full speed on a direct course for the buried explosives. Taranae made the animal hop off the boulder and slowly approach the sniper as if it was curious, hoping to keep his attention. But suddenly his focus snapped back to the canyon floor as he watched one of the attackers race across the open space below him. He gazed along the sights of his KiSteer 1284 rifle and lined up his shot.

Knowing it was now or never, Taranae gave the signal to her small friend. It hissed threateningly and leaped upon the lone gunner. He screamed as it clawed and bit at his back. Rolling over, he tried to crush it under the weight of his body, but as he did so, the animal followed suit and scrambled around to the front of him. It bit his face, drawing a horrible scream from him as his face contorted with pain and his eyes were attacked with razor sharp claws as the relentless attack continued.

The runner heard the screams from above and knew someone or something had bought him more time. He slowed as he reached the wall and found the explosive device. It was some kind of panel which was wired to devices planted into the bottom of the wall itself and he traced the wiring to make sure it was all connected. After finding all the wires intact and connected, he poised himself for the next phase. He gauged the distance between himself and the rest of the team. He would have to be fast or he would never make it. The timer was set, but not for long. It was a risk, but he had to take it. He flicked the switch and ran, hoping his legs would get him out of harm’s way before the whole wall came down around him.

The sith sensed the change in the air as the explosives were primed, a slight electricity. She reached out to the monkey-lizard and made it jump from the sniper’s face. She planted a plethora of thoughts into its tiny head as it hit the floor. *Run, fear, panic.* The little animal took its cue and ran as fast as it could whilst the gunman writhed in pain on the plateau above the canyon wall. Below, the explosives blew. The blast was huge, kicking out debris in all directions. The cloud billowed upwards and outwards as the cliff slowly began to crumble, the damage from the explosion working its way upwards and breaking off whole chunks. As the sniper writhed, he was oblivious to the edge of the canyon caving in, and his body following the collapse down onto the canyon floor. His entire being shook as he landed on the dislodged rocks below and was immediately covered by layer upon layer of rock and dust. He would trouble the team no more.

With her link to the creature broken, Taranae sighed as fatigue set in. Controlling the creature at such a range had worn on her badly and she needed rest. But now that the danger was taken care of, she could at least rest safe in the knowledge that they could continue their plan and hit the Jedi where it hurt. They would march up this canyon and take the orbital cannon. That would be the end of the Jedi starfighters.