

# ***Subterfuge***

Jormungand Quarry, Ptolomea

34 ABY

Author: Blade Ta'var

Author's Note: John is a Human NPC Force User from Excidium, Rank DJK

---

The bright blue sky blazed against the horizon, its rays illuminating a depressing landscape of gray rocks and derelict equipment. Debris littered the landscape, and faded posters dotted the rock walls in uneven intervals. This was the Jormungand Quarry in its full grandeur, or so everyone thought. It had not been used for some time, but recently House Imperium had received intelligence that this was operating as a crucial communication hub for House Excidium. It was for this reason alone that Blade was currently within its bowels, following a plan set forth in motion by Jarl Qor that would ensure its destruction. She was a prisoner at the moment, but it was now time for her role as a spy to come to fruition.

These musings were her only companion during her stay at the quarry's makeshift prison cell. It was a multi-purpose room whose door had recently been fitted with several locks. Inside, everything was a dull grey. The furniture was very sparse save for two chairs and a lone table. She occupied one of those chairs with her back against the wall, which was rather uncomfortable despite making her posture look impeccable.

Security guards surrounded her in a semicircle, their demeanor alert but oddly relaxed. Even with her hands tightly bound, her pheromones had no such restraint. They seemed to be having their desired effect. She had been broadcasting them on low for a while now, though perhaps she didn't need to as her form fitting dark blue outfit captured the attention of more than a few guards.

Blade was filled with mixed emotions as she looked at her Excidium captors. It made her feel uncomfortable being forced to analyze how to beat her former House. She had left no more than a month ago, but the memories were still as fresh as yesterday. The guards stared at her with malicious intent, which wasn't surprising considering her status as number one traitor. Most of Excidium firmly believed this, but most of the Force users knew her as something very different. In their eyes, she wasn't a traitor but rather a well placed spy, a beauty with swords and a dangerous warrior. In truth, many felt she was a dagger that oscillated between Imperium and Excidium, and everyone wondered 'Who would feel the knife?'

Blade had nothing to do so she decided to poke at the question that had become the space-elephant in the room: *why was everyone so alert?* In particular, the Sergeant in charge had been acting quite paranoid, often swiveling his head back and forth to check on the other guards. She was only a Dark Jedi Knight, but many found even the possibility of a Zeltron's pheromones to be stressful. In fact, she had already been warned by the Sergeant that she would be shot if she tried anything funny. The joke was

on him. Nonetheless, she showed the Sergeant some respect and hadn't tried anything too overt, which didn't matter too much because her curves seemed to be more than enough to kept the guards attention. She smiled with pleasure at the contradiction, men and women told to hate something they would love to touch.

"What's so funny, succubus? You won't be smiling once the interrogator comes," growled the Sergeant.

"Oh Sergeant, ease up. I am going to see friends," she reassured with a smirk. "Besides, I have fine men and women for company."

"Just wait till we break out the torture devices. We'll wipe that smirk off your face," the Sergeant threatened as he balled his hand into a fist.

"Oooh...Are we going to have a party?! I brought along some music just in case. Do we have any Rancor Tequila?" Blade asked eagerly.

"SHUT THE FWEC UP, NOT ONE MORE WORD FROM YOU!" the Sergeant yelled as his hands trembled with rage.

The Sergeant currently had a gun pointed at her head, so Blade shrugged and simply smiled at her captors. She loved to press people's buttons, but she also didn't want to die right now.

Unfortunately, she wasn't provided much to do and the time seemed to pass very slowly. She didn't want to risk speaking, so she took to facial expressions. A few of guards cracked up, which was usually met with a swift growl from the curmudgeon Sergeant. The Sergeant didn't harm her though, so she alternatively flirted and made funny faces until she was given the appropriate level of attention.

The door to her cell opened and a handsome man named John entered the room, her lightsaber attached to his belt. Surprise and pleasure filled her face, since this was someone she knew well from the many Excidium parties. She didn't know he would be guarding this installation, but he would be very useful. She mused to herself that luck was a wonderful thing when it worked in your favor, but given the amount of people she met at parties maybe she shouldn't be too surprised. The security guards snapped to attention, but the Sergeant kept his gun aimed at her head.

"Sir, prisoner detained and ready for interrogation," stated the Sergeant.

"Please Sergeant, stop lying to yourself. You just want an excuse to play with me," teased Blade.

"Permission to assist in your interrogation," requested the flustered Sergeant.

“Ah, Blade, I’ve missed you. You’ve made the poor Sergeant blush,” John half-laughed as the Sergeant’s face went pink.

“You don’t invite me to your parties anymore. Where is my Rancor Tequila?” Blade asked with a flirtatious smile.

“Where are my manners? Let me grab some before we begin. Sergeant, grab a few bottles from my stash,” ordered John.

“Sir, I must protest. This is a prisoner interrogation, not a party,” the Sergeant stated in an annoyed tone.

“Did I stutter Sergeant!? Go get the Rancor Tequila!” ordered John.

“Sir, you’re being affected by the Zeltron. I must insist we immediately start the interrogation,” pressed the Sergeant stubbornly.

“You insolent fool!” John hissed angrily.

John stared the Sergeant down, both men’s faces bright red. The guards in the room eyed the pair of them warily, and some of them even took a step or two back. It was a short showdown though, the snap-hiss of a lightsaber the only warning the Sergeant received. John quickly ended it with a swift swipe of Blade’s red lightsaber, its path from belt to final flourish seamless.

The Sergeant never had time to defend himself, and Blade’s weapon had struck the deadly blow. The first life her lightsaber had taken was a member of Excidium, a house to which she had once pledged her loyalty. It would be worth it in the end though, and now an obstacle was out of her way. Blade took advantage of his absence, and released the full power of her pheromones into the room.

“How about that Rancor Tequila? Let’s all have some.” Blade offered.

John still had her lightsaber lit as he turned his attention to her, but his anger disappeared into a smile as he locked eyes with her.

“What are you guys waiting for? Go get some Rancor Tequila! Everyone can have a bottle. I can handle an unarmed prisoner until you get back. Now go!” ordered John as he returned her lightsaber to his belt.

Some of the guards hesitated at first, but eventually they filed out of the room in an excited rush. It wasn’t everyday that your boss welcomed you to his stash of booze, and the Sergeant’s death was still fresh in their minds. After the guards left, John pulled the only remaining chair in the room close to Blade and leaned in to speak to her. His stare was intense, and it held a hurt expression.

“Let's have a quick chat before they come back. First, why did you leave us? Second, why are you here? I don't trust the rumors,” John asked searchingly.

“Don't you trust me?” Blade asked, her tone serious.

“I never trust myself around you. I can never tell when you're working me, but I still come back for more. For all I know you made me kill that man,” John responded with a resigned smile as he shook his head.

This would be the hardest part, conning her friends that continued to give her the benefit of the doubt. She reminded herself that all of these people were far from innocent, and that justice would have to be handed down at some point. It wasn't reassuring, but it helped her resolve. A piece of her soul would be a fair price to pay.

“You swung the saber, John, and don't you tell me you didn't enjoy it,” Blade retorted.

“Yes, I swung the saber, but I swear you used pheromones,” argued John.

“How do you know? I could be using them right now,” replied Blade with a smirk.

“God damn it, Blade, I am trying to interrogate you and you are making me laugh. Will you just answer my questions? No Rancor Tequila until you do,” bargained John, his malicious chuckle bringing back old memories.

She pretended to pout for a few seconds, but then feigned defeat.

“Fine, I'll tell you,” she replied with a sigh, “but you won't be too surprised.”

“I'm all ears, beautiful,” replied John.

“One, I left because it was the perfect opportunity to plant an Excidium member within Imperium leadership. It was that simple. By the way, I have missed your parties and you should invite me to more of them. Two, I have information to drop, so I called a meeting here and had them arrange me a lovely escort,” she explained as she raised her bound hands.

“Say I believe you. What kind of information do you have?” asked John seriously.

“Troop and fleet movements, personnel records, and installation locations. If you want to know more, I need to get my hands on a terminal,” Blade replied.

John sunk deep into thought for a moment or two, his face eventually giving way to a friendly smile.

“You're such a player. I bet you have them eating out of your hands. I love when you're devious,” admired John.

“I know,” she said in an amused tone. “Now, let’s go drop that data.”

“Follow me. Once we are done, let’s join the rest of the guards and have a real party,” John offered.

“Sounds good to me,” Blade smiled.

Blade sat patiently as John undid her restraints, her lightsaber mere inches away. It called to her, but it wasn’t time just yet. John waved her through the door and the pair briskly walked the halls to the nearest terminal. She committed the layout of the facility to memory as she walked, but she hoped the terminal would be able to provide a map. She also needed to get rid of her lovable spare. The pair rounded a few corners and entered an empty room full of terminals, one of which John used to input his login credentials.

“Thank you for believing me. I really appreciate it, given how much I had to give up for this assignment,” she stated in a sincerely appreciative tone.

Blade didn’t let him reply, and immediately executed several quick strikes to several nerve centers, her movements almost a blur as she used the Force to speed up the velocity of her arms. John didn’t expect it, her pheromones and his willful ignorance a double punch. It was a delay of seconds, but that made all the difference when it came to defense.

John’s body collapsed into her arms, a testament to her martial art form K’tara. She dragged his limp body to a storage closet in the room and retrieved a hidden data rod from her person. She deposited it in his pocket, grabbed her lightsaber, and locked him in. It may be cramped, but it would protect the adorable fool from Shadow Guard’s assault on the communication hub.

Blade went back to the terminal that John had opened for her and brought up the security cameras, flicking through the back entryways for a sign of Shadow Guard. Her comlink was confiscated from her, but Jarl Qor’s plan had anticipated that possibility. She just had to meet up with Shadow Guard.

She was starting to worry as she cycled through the cameras, but then she saw a group of people in the distance. *That had to be them!* She quickly searched for a map, thankfully finding one, and downloaded it onto one of the data pads stacked to the right of the terminal. She then mentally marked the rendezvous point, and took off to join Shadow Guard.

She relied on her memory and the datapad to find her way to the rendezvous point, using her lightsaber to dispatch of any pesky guards in her way. Interestingly enough, the hallways were rather empty and she could hear distant cheers. Her prison guards must have shared the Rancor Tequila with their friends, who would at least die happy.

She turned a corner into the lobby through which Shadow Guard would be entering, and found a lone sullen guard. He must have pulled the short straw. She only gave him time to register shock before she had cut him in half with her lightsaber, his pieces thumping onto the ground. She deactivated her lightsaber and examined the door. She would need an access key. She searched the dead guard lying near the door, and found one in his pocket. This was exactly what she needed.

Ignoring the sickening stench of cauterized flesh, she used the Force to reach out to the other side of the door and waited for a familiar presence. Delak didn't leave her waiting too long, and soon after she felt his angry presence. She found an access key on the dead guard lying on the ground, and used it to open the door. The door revealed an armed and lethal Shadow Guard waiting on the other side. The booms of aerial strikes ripped through the air and pushed their way through the opened door.

"Thanks for letting us in, Blade. I hope you left some fun for us," Delak stated as he gestured to the dead guard.

"That's Shadow Guard's job, but I've already helped you guys out by distracting the guards. Here is a map of the facility, and the communication hub is in the center. Let me know when you've taken it out. I'll clean up the distracted guards while you take on the primary objective," Blade ordered.

"Works for me. I like the difficult parts. Here is a comlink. Jarl Qor arranged a shuttle to extract us as soon as I give the word, so don't miss the shuttle," Delak stated.

"I'll be waiting. For Imperium!" Blade exclaimed.

"For Imperium!" Shadow Guard replied.

Blade watched as the team set off with Delak at the front, who was leading the charge. These were her new housemates, and she already felt closer to them despite her short tenure. She hoped that Excidium would forgive her one day, but her crimes were not over yet. She turned around and raced off to find the source of the distant cheers, their dulcet tones leading the way. She ran through the hallway until she found a large group of men taking shots of blue liquid, her favorite Rancor Tequila, in a large mess hall. They naturally huddled into three groups, each a multi-species mass clustered together. As a trained marauder Blade grinned with anticipation.

She walked to the closest huddle of people, who didn't seem to register her presence as a threat. Her lightsaber came to life with a snap-hiss. She quickly swung her lightsaber in a long horizontal swipe, which cut through several unaware guards. The challenge had begun. She sunk deeply into the Force, relished her victory over the security guards and began her attack in earnest. Her swings came from all directions. They were swift, rapid, and unpredictable. Each body she cut through gave her energy to strike faster and harder.

By the time she had cut down the first group, the other ones had already started to reach for their weapons. She didn't give them much time to fight back though, and used the Force to assist her jump so that she flipped right into the center of the second group. As she landed, she spun her body around and sliced the guard's hips clean apart. Their screams echoed in the room, a warning to others. The guards in the second group became a circle of cauterized flesh, their remains forming a ring of debris around her.

The last group finally got their weapons up and took aim. Blade let the Force guide her actions, her body using her lightsaber to deflect stray blaster bolts whenever dodging was not an option. She made her way over to the last group, their faces desperate and fearful. As she closed in, her lightsaber whipped in chaotic strikes that felled each guard that stood in her way. This was a beautiful moment, one warrior against many in a battleground that was interconnected. All one had to do was weave oneself through it, almost like a dance.

Her crimson blade flashed through the last guard, leaving a line of cauterized flesh across his torso. The room became silent except for the hum of her lightsaber. She gazed at the dead and swallowed the fact that she was their executioner. There was no going back now, but at least justice had been served. She gazed around the room and surveyed the damage. The bastards didn't drink all of the Rancor Tequila, so there was that at least. She deactivated her lightsaber, grabbed a bottle for herself and made her way back to the rendezvous point.

Blade was halfway there when Delak finally piped in on her comlink.

"Blade, communication hub destroyed. Heading back to the shuttle," stated Delak.

"Great job, I'll meet you in the lobby," replied Blade.

"Jarl Qor, the communication hub is destroyed. We are making our way to the extraction point. Request that the aerial team provide us a way out," Blade requested.

"It will be done. Good work," replied Jarl Qor.

Blade ran the rest of the journey back to the lobby, and waited for Delak's team to return. The sounds of the aerial strikes had ceased for the time being, and she hoped that it meant that the path was clear to the shuttle. A few tense minutes passed, but Shadow Guard rounded the corner flushed with victory.

"Let's go!" Blade urged as she waved them through the open door with her Rancor Tequila bottle.

Blade followed immediately after them and covered their flank. There was general chaos outside, blaster cross-fire turning the once peaceful quarry in front of her into a

battle zone. It could have been worse though. Many of the soldiers were already dead from the earlier aerial strikes.

Thankfully, a well piloted shuttle quickly touched down fifteen meters away from them. Some soldiers were already starting to point their weapons at it. There was no time to lose. Shadow Guard piled into it and Blade quickly followed suit. The landing gate closed in on them and the voice of a cocky pilot by the name of Drake Starfire filled the cabin.

“Good evening and welcome to the *Blue Milk King*. Please fasten your seat belts while I fly like a lunatic to get us out of here,” Drake instructed.

There were a few groans from some of the men, but Blade just shook her head and grinned. He could be quite a handful sometimes, but he was a decent pilot. She sat back, closed her eyes and thought about John and the data rod. She sincerely hoped he would live, because that information could even the odds and Excidium still had a role to play. Imperium would continue to play its role and reap the benefits of her prior intel on Excidium. Lastly, Jarl Qor would never know her role in establishing the events to come. Her form of justice wasn't always understood, but one day it would become clear. At that point, it would be too late for both sides.

“Skald here, we are heading back to the main fleet. Congratulations on the victory! I'll see you soon on March Isles. I've even brought a bottle of Rancor Tequila as a souvenir. Skald out!” Blade informed Jarl Qor.

*The true horrors of war were coming, and the puppets were oblivious to their strings.*