**Deserted**

**By Kor Vaal**

Kor Vaal awoke alone.

There was nothing unusual in that of course. It was, in fact, how it should be. He was not given to sharing his bed, nor for group revelries where inebriation preceded awakening in an unfamiliar space with unfamiliar people, as others did. Waking alone was no cause for concern to the reclusive Kel Dor. It was the manner of the alone which gave rise to alarm. Through his protective goggles, his view stretched out over an unfamiliar landscape, a barren expanse of harsh, jagged rocks and long dead trees. Feeling returned to his body, granting him the unwelcome knowledge that he was on his back, and he groggily rose to his feet. Confusion reigned as he surveyed his bleak surroundings. To his right a great rocky mountain range stretched out, to his left…nothing, just the barren sand and rocks, ever on into the distance. Why was he here? How had he come to be here? *Where* was here? There was nothing familiar about this place, and the few cracked and withered trees and rocky outcrops were hardly helpful to determining his location. Could he be on Antenora? Was he even within the Cocytus system? He racked his memories for any clues to his current situation. Before he awoke he had been in his chambers meditating, that much he was certain of, but could remember nothing more. Had he been brought here by someone within the clan? Perhaps rendered unconscious by some poison which was affecting his memory? There were those in Scholae Palatinae with the knowledge and skills of such things. The Quaestor of House Imperium was well known for his proficiency with deadly and debilitating substances, though Kor Vaal could see no reason why the Quarren would wish to dispose of him. He checked for his lightsaber, and was relieved to find it still hanging from his belt, though he seemed to be bereft of any other belongings. Primarily, he had no water or nutrient gruels with him. There were no obvious signs of habitation around, night was falling and the temperature had been steadily dropping since he’d awoken. He wasn’t prepared for this! He was not meant for the wilderness, and had no idea what he was supposed to do, or how he was going to survive. Shelter, he needed shelter from the cold night, that much he knew. A sound reached him, a faint chittering on the edge of his hearing. He reached out with his senses, feeling something…bestial. Something hungry. A line of sand began to shift to his left, creating a snaking trail heading straight towards him. A ripple passed through his mind, and he ignited his saber, spinning and striking out as the thing erupted out of the sand, jaw pulsating as it rushed towards Kor Vaal’s head. The two halves of the creature lay writhing on the sand, a snake like thing the length of his forearm, with spines sprouting out all over its body and an open maw with rows of needle like teeth. As he inspected the creature, more chittering stung the edge of his hearing. Another creature came out of the sand, and he spun his arm out, severing its head. Before the thing had hit the ground another came at him, then another. They were coming out at him from all angles now, and Kor twisted and swung to meet each with the caress of his saber. Eventually the tide of leaping snakes subsided, and Kor Vaal panted as he deactivated his blade took stock of his situation, a score of the vile things butchered and smoking at his feet. He needed to get moving, but where to? To the mountain range in the hopes of finding a cave he could shelter in, or to walk the desert expanse for signs of civilization? Before he could reach a decision the chittering started again, not the faint like before, but rolling like the sound of distant thunder. The sand out further in the desert began to thrash and pulsate. It looked like it was coming closer, fast. Kor Vaal spun on his heel and began to run to the mountains. *Decision made,* he though as he began to race to the hopeful shelter of the rocks.

The things were leaping from the sand now, their teeth snapping at his heels before they dived back beneath the surface, another taking its place from the trashing grit. His legs were burning from the running, but he had to keep going, there were too many of them to keep fighting. And he was so close now, so close! He focussed on keeping his legs moving, on the rapidly approaching mountains. He approached a sheer rock face, the frantic chittering reaching a thunderous crescendo. Kor saw no option. He called on the Force, pushing everything he had into his legs and leaping as the snake things erupted from the ground. He felt one latch onto his leg, needle like teeth piercing the flesh and breaking his concentration. He crashed onto a plateau of rock, and tumbled into a heap on the floor with the creature still biting and thrashing against him. He screamed in fury as he reached down and tore the thing from his leg, crushing it in his hand, the creature’s innards and white ichor oozing between his fingers as it writhed in its death throes. He cast it away in disgust, breathing hard from the exertion, and tried to bring his violently shaking body under control. The chittering sound began to recede, as he’d hoped it would; the things could only travel in the sand it seemed, leaving him in relative safety, for the time being. He tried to move and winced in pain. His left ankle screamed in sharp agony, twisted by the landing on the rock, while his right was slick with blood trickling from the snake creatures bite. Anger flared up within him, at the indignity of his situation, at his carelessness for allowing himself to be cast off on this rock, but most importantly at whoever had orchestrated all this. He would find them, he promised himself. There *would* be a reckoning. But without shelter from the night, water and food he knew that reckoning might be in whatever waited beyond the embrace of the Force. With hate fuelled determination he clambered to his feet as best he could, and set off, limping through a crack in the rock and into the mountains proper.

How long had he trudged through this range? Had it been an hour, three? More? Night had fallen and with its cold embrace time had ceased to exist. A chill wind had picked up, buffeting against him and sinking icy needles through his robes. He could see little, feeling his way through the jagged surroundings. He stumbled a great deal, sending lances of pain shooting up his legs. The bleeding had thankfully stopped, but his ankle still protested at his continued movement. The first ragged tugs of thirst were there now too, and hunger began to force his stomach to knot inside of him. He pushed himself forward, refusing to give in, willing his salvation to be around the next corner or over the next rise. Eventually he came upon it. His sight improved, and with a start he realised there was light, a soft glow emanating from a cave entrance just ahead of him. He picked up speed and practically barrelled into the open cave mouth, scrabbling further in and rounding a bend before collapsing in front of a wall and wrapping his robes around him. A strange lichen clung high on the cave walls, giving off an ethereal glow; not enough to completely penetrate the gloom, but a welcome respite from the constant dark. He was free from the wind now at least, and knew he could do more now. His mouth was dry behind his mask, his stomach raged at him for sustenance, but for now he was spent. He closed his eyes and let his head drop, trying his best to ignore the agony in his body, and recited an ancient Sith mantra, pushing himself into a meditative state to wait out the night.

He opened his eyes. He didn’t know how long he’d slept, but day hadn’t broken yet. How long were the night cycles on this planet? It was impossible to know. An icy chill suddenly flicked down his spine. Why had he awoken now? He stretched out with his senses, pushing through the mist in his mind that dehydration and hunger caused. He was not alone here. Slowly, he reached across for his weapon, igniting the blade and throwing red light through the cave. A segmented monstrosity scuttled back from him, its dozen legs clattering against the rock floor. The moments surprise faded from it and it lunged towards him, twin tails shooting over it, stingers glinting in the hellish light. He dodged to his left just quick enough to avoid the black lances and swung hard, severing the creature’s legs on one side and tearing a deep gash across it, its innards spilling out as it thrashed wildly. Kor Vaal collapsed to one knee, his ankle betraying him and forcing his leg to buckle beneath him. A second creature came scuttling over its fallen kin, its stingers darting towards his face. He brought his saber round and severed the tails, spinning the handle into a reverse grip and plunging it between the things multiple eyes. Kor Vaal withdrew his blade and the creature convulsed before sinking dead to the floor.

“Should’ve learned from the other,” Kor chided, panting as the exertion of combat in his weakened state. But the third creature had learned. He sensed it too late, seeing the twin stings burst through his right shoulder before being withdrawn with lighting fast speed. He screamed in agony, his weapon clattering to the floor from dead fingers and fizzing out. He spun and pushed himself back from the thing, blood pumping from the twin punctures in his shoulder, his vision swimming. The thing dropped low, it’s limbs taught and its mandibles clicking. Kor tried to pull something, anything from the Force to aid him, but he could do nothing. He knew this was it, his body was too weak and wracked with pain, his mind full on only one thing; the certainty of his impending death. He screamed his rage as the creature leapt towards him, its tails poised to strike the killing blow.

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His head swam. Was that a vision? A dream? He had never felt anything that real before. He looked at the candles on the small table in front of him. They had burned for mere seconds since he had begun. He checked around the small room, seeing no sand or segmented creatures ready to pounce. He reached a hand to his shoulder. Nothing, no puncture wounds, no blood, just his undamaged robes. He rubbed his temples, trying to piece together what had happened. In all his training and his meditations, never before had anything felt so vivid. But there was always a reason to these things, he knew that. He played the events through his mind, trying to discern some sort of pattern or insight from them before they began to fade from his mind. He had been unprepared for such a situation, that much he realised. Was that it? A warning? Some sort of premonition that he needed to learn how to survive? He would meditate on it, perhaps even approach some members of the clan whose lives had trained them for such things. He had found a weakness in himself that could be corrected, and that was something he could take away from this. One more thing crossed his mind. He had considered a person in his…vision. The Quaestor of House Imperium, Lexiconus. He had no reason to be suspicious of the Quarren, why then had that one, of all others come to his mind? Perhaps a meeting between them was in order. A chime rang out through his chamber as he considered this. House Excidium was being summoned. Putting other thoughts to the back of his mind he began to rise from his position and headed towards the door. He ignored the slight pain in his left ankle and the faint chill it sent through him.

The End

**Knight Kor Vaal (Sith) / House Excidium of Clan Scholae Palatinae [SA: IV] [ACC: Q] [INQ: IV]**

**SCx2 / ACx4 / DCx4 / Cr:2R-2A-10S-3E-4T / CFx2 / CIx4 / DSSx3 / LSx2 / S:4Al**

**{SA: MVH - DPE - DPV}**