***Spies on the Beach***

 “Just *one day*, I’d like to not be bothered on my time off!”

The message on the Zeltron’s communicator kept buzzing *priority alert*, and it was only by a stroke of luck that the beach-going mercenary even had the device on her. After days in the cramped confines of a transport and battling the Dominion on Agua’tah, Qyreia was ready for some rest and relaxation on the Dakhani homeworld of Aeotheran. It was a rare enough event that she went out of her way for recreation, much less one where she was in a swimsuit, so the message was quite the blow to her mood.

Reaching a hand into her beach bag ensured that her pistol was still inside. *At least I’ve got this to work with.* What she wondered most was: why was the Dominion on Aeotheran? Hadn’t they been beaten to a bloody mess? Yet her communicator’s screen still shone in large, bold text that they had infiltrated the planet. *Not that hard to do*, Qyreia thought, looking around at the tourists that flooded the Gilded Archipelago. *There’s enough traffic here to hide a Wookiee in a barbershop.*

Fortunately, the member races of the Dominion were rather unique, so spotting any insurgents shouldn’t be too difficult of a task. The problem that she soon found, however, was that vacationers don’t tend to pay attention to their surroundings unless it involved food, fun, or a fine body.

None of these things was particularly applicable to the enemy she was trying to find. Furthermore, if one of their Clawdite agents had landed here, then it would be almost impossible for the non-Force user to track them. As a precaution, she used her pull with the local authorities to check their scanning records from the customs checkpoints at the starport. That would at least ease some of the worry. The power plant and other high-profile infrastructure elements were already aware of the security breach, but the former Black Guard made sure that they did a sweep of their properties anyway.

The one thing that Qyreia *didn’t* do was to actively search on her own. Humans might be able to blend into a crowd, along with many of the near-human species of the galaxy, but Zeltrons did not often travel quite so far from home, nor were they so easily able to hide their iconic appearance. If the mercenary were to go rushing around, it would only tip off the insurgents as to her activities and intentions.

Her best bet was to go to a high-traffic location and simply keep an eye out. “Well, I’m dressed for the beach…”

An hour and several drinks later, Qyreia had not spotted anyone of particular note or that seemed suspicious in any way, save for the beachgoers that were eyeing her bare skin with a little too much attention. *And this is why I stay fully clothed and on a starship all the time*. The sites she had contacted had at least performed their sweeps and tightened security, with no apparent breaches. The starport had little to report either, suggesting that if there were going to be an attack, it would likely be centered on the much larger and more strategically important Seng Karash.

“Except half the estates of the wealthier Sadowan members are here in the Archipelago,” she muttered quietly to herself. “Not that some of them couldn’t stand to be knocked down a peg.”

Deciding the beach was a poor location to look for a spy, Qyreia paid her liquor bill and walked casually toward one of the nicer clubs that was situated nearby. A seedy cantina was a fine place for illegal deals among other lowlifes, but in situations like this, experience told the mercenary that dark, loud, and crowded offered the best staging ground.

She had been in this club before – even danced a little – but today was a day to relax and keep her eyes on the scenery. If anything, she couldn’t leave her weapon unattended at the table when there might be someone around that wanted nothing more than to pick off a nominally high-profile Sadowan. The music thumped into Qyreia’s ribcage as she ordered a drink and sat down, wondering just how much of the Clan’s and House’s business was public knowledge within their domain, or if the people treated it like any other government and just went about their daily lives to eke out an enjoyable existence.

The dance floor was a writhing mass of hedonism, some of the revelers’ moves just shy of getting them kicked out – and the rules for indecency were rather loose in these establishments. Considering this particular establishment had guest rooms that overlooked the party floor, the allowed activities were pretty loose in restriction; even better for the supposed insurgents.

Qyreia felt a sudden pressure in her groin. Despite the heat of the beach and her livers’ ability to process her drinks’ alcohol, her bladder had been relatively ignored in the rush of the action. *Sithspit… and I was just getting comfortable, too.* Taking her bag slung over one shoulder, and her drink in the other hand, the Zeltron made her way through the crowded bar area toward the nearest refresher. Darkened alcoves were inset along the walls, some of which were populated by particularly… *occupied* patrons, which drew Qyreia’s attention somewhat as she passed.

“Don’t see *that* every day,” she said to herself with a smile, the words drowned out by the music that thrummed through the air.

The music also covered the movements of the person behind her that, as she was about to turn the corner for the refresher, grabbed and threw her into the adjacent empty alcove. The mercenary didn’t even have time to get up and face her attacker before she felt an arm wrap around her neck, lift her up, and press her violently into the wall. *Oh frack no! You did* not *just pick* me *to play these games with!* Only too late did she realize that the initial throw had also tossed her bag aside.

“I’d say you could scream, Sadowan,” the harsh male voice said in her ear, “but I don’t think the people out there will hear you. Not that they’d realize *what* you were yelling about until it was too late.”

*You’re fracking kidding me.* This *is the insurgent?!* “What...” she half-choked out, “what do you want?”

“The security codes for the geothermal plant.”

“Why do you need…” Her question was met by increased pressure on her throat from his arm, while he pressed her cheek harder into the wall.

“The codes, or I make this *more* uncomfortable.”

Qyreia could only imagine what that might entail, but she had several strong hunches. What was worse, this man had her firmly planted and relatively unable to move. She could shift her feet, but not to any real effect. Her sandaled feet would do little on his hard leather boots, and he was too close to kick at or flail with her arms. Any wrong fidget only increased the pressure on her windpipe.

“Frack you,” she groaned fruitlessly.

He was about to make good on his promise when the report of a blaster echoed in the small space, and the human male fell away clutching at his shoulder. Standing at the entrance was one of the security personnel of the club, gun barrel making the air around it shimmer with heat. Apparently Aeotheran security had tracked her movements just as much as this agent likely had, and notified the establishment’s staff to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity.

This simple security guard had just saved Qyreia Arronen’s life; maybe more.

“Are you alright, ma’am?”

“Get this guy locked up and under *heavy* guard!” The Zeltron’s voice came in labored spurts as she got her wind back. “I’m going to call up to Naga Sadow headquarters and get an interrogation team on his choobies.”

Bending down to collect her bag, Qyreia paused in departing only to leave a solid kick in her assailant’s groin. She also offered some very sincere thanks to both the management and the guard for saving her. Despite the pedestaled view that most of the Sadowans and Brotherhood members tended to hold themselves compared with their subordinate populations, Qyreia liked to show that these folks were appreciated. After all, she was just like them. It was her duty to keep them safe.