The Witches Of Dathomir

By: Jarith Krasa

 The scream of the dropship’s engines echoed through the landing bay as Jarith replayed his message from Savant Caesar. Caesar’s normally light demeanor replaced by one far more dire as he issues his brief instructions.

“At three hundred hours all communication with the Nekros Syndicate research team was silenced. It is imperative that your team reach the fortress immediately. The dead have…”

 The holocommunicator sparked violently in Jarith’s hand as the image flashed once and was gone. At the same instance the drop ship lurched violently as ozone scented smoke filled the landing bay. To his left Kortius sprang from his seat to catching a falling tooper with a powerful left arm and halting their momentum with his right. Likewise M7-39 halted the fall of stowed blasters and sentry turrets as the ship spiraled through the trees. Jarith however stared silently at the smiling painted face of the spirit that faded lowly at the rear of the bay.

“Almost got her stabilized Jarith,” Zahirra announced over the ship’s communicator, “we are hitting hard, brace yourselves!”

 A tortured rending sound loud enough to illicit screams of pain from the troopers signaled a sudden powerful lurch as the ship altered its course ninety degrees flinging everyone in the troop bay against the bulkhead. Even Kortius, trooper in his left hand and durasteel brace in his right hand found himself crushed into the pile. For a moment no one moved as the ship ground slowly to a stop in the Dathomir swamp. Deep thunderous laughing erupted from Kortius as he forced the trooper to his feet and began to rise.

“Not your worst landing Zahirra,” he said still laughing. “Zahirra, come on, you aren’t that bad of a pilot,” he continued after a moment of silence.

 Jarith jumped to his feet, turning in one graceful motion to the flight deck. Kortius followed close behind as M7 automatically started prepping the medical supplies wordlessly. Through the partially opened cockpit doors Jarith could see Zahirra seated at the controls, her head leaning over the controls.

 “Kortius,” Jarith said grimly moving to the side to let the big Mandalorian pass.

 Kortius grabbed the malfunctioning door with both hands and pulled, grunting audibly with the effort. Slowly and with protests of screeching metal the door bent towards his massive frame. Roaring with effort Kortius gave the door several quick violent jerks until a space opened up wide enough for M7 to squeeze through. Kortius fell back against the bulkhead panting from exertion even as Jarith moved around him and through the ruined door to assist M7.

“She’s alive, though she is in no conditioned to be moved,” the droid reported as he continued examining Zahirra's unconscious body. “She has suffered several fractures lacerations, I do not think moving her is advisable.”

“Stay with her M7,” Jarith replied grimly before turning from the cockpit to face Kortius. “Keep the safe and if we aren’t back by dawn head for the Nekros outpost and get off of this rock.”

 Kortius nodded once as Jarith continued past him into the troop bay to find the troopers already gearing up with blaster rifles, energy cells, the curved sabers that he insists his warriors carry, and the automated sentry turrets. Falling in line for an equipment check, each trooper presented their weapon for inspection as Jarith walked by scanning each visually without slow to the landing ramp.

“Kel, check your safety, Hichash, Coumea set the turrets outside, everyone else wedge formation on me,” Jarith commanded loudly as he pulled the emergency release lever on the landing ramp.

 Two by Two each trooper fell into their place in formation, those on the left sweeping their rifles out to their left side and those on the right sweeping right as they stepped off of the ramp and into the heavy rain of the Dathomir swamp. Hichash and Coumea followed swiftly behind with heavy cases containing the automated turrets in either hand with Kel taking up security to cover their work. Jarith marched his men forward a look of grim purpose etched across his face before it was covered by the mask he has worn for every battle since his days in House Revan. The red light of Dathomir replaced with the clear day as the mask’s functions autocorrected for the lighting.

“Angeag take point,” Jarith radioed over the helmet’s integrated com system to the trooper on his immediate right.

 The trooper rushed ahead silent as a shadow into the thick swamp woodlands ahead of unit that now helmeted resembled walking ghosts, moving in practiced unison behind their grim leader.

“Contact front,” Angeag’s static distorted voice announced as rapid red flashes of light punctuated by two pink flashes indicated his position.

With a wave of his left hand two of the troopers on Jarith’s left rushed forward rifles at the ready as the team followed rapidly without breaking formation. The flashes or red increased briefly and then ceased abruptly as swiftly as they began. As Jarith’s formation entered the site of the battle they were greeted by the sight of Angeag and the troopers Edasich and Wenali standing over the remains fallen form of a mummified woman in tattered red clothing.

“Report,” Jarith commanded as he surveyed the remains.

“One target, she from the trees and attacked without provocation. She was carrying this,” Angeag said as he presented a strange bow like weapon to Jarith.

“Support,” Jarith asked taking the weapon absently as he scanned the trees.

“Negative sir,” Angeag replied as he took up a defensive position.

“Sound off,” Jarith commanded suddenly.

“Angeag clear.” “Edasich clear.” “Wenali clear.” “Kwiedyi clear.” “Wentow clear.” “Ceros clear,” each trooper called out in order.

“Bighayr report,” Jarith commanded after a moment of silence before turning to Bighayr’s position.

 On the mud covered swamp floor Bighayr’s body, the tattered remnants of his neck filling the opening of his armor, sitting next to his rifle. The ambush was instantly clear to everyone prompting Jarith to draw his saber and the troopers to form a defensive perimeter even as the mummified forms of several dozen women burst screaming from the thick woods. Without order each trooper opened fire, ripping into their attackers with deadly red energy. As the first of them slipped through the perimeter Jarith knew that the team could not hold their ground.

“ Form up, Wenali, Kwiedyi cover the rear; Angeag, Edasich front; Wentow, Ceros move to flanks, let’s move,” Jarith ordered even as he removed the head of the creature as it ran screaming toward him.

 For several long moments they came at the unit, throwing spears and ripping with empty hands that seemed to be possessed of unnatural power. It wasn’t until the team reached the outer perimeter of the fortress that the attacks lessened long enough for Jarith to radio Kortius getting only static in return. Signaling the team to halt Jarith surveyed the situation. Kwiedyi and Ceros showing clear signs of injury as broken spear points laced with thin lines of blood stood in stark contrast to their armor. Edasich was missing and though the attacks had lessened they had not stopped.

“Angeag, take the team back to the ship and report back, then gather whatever you can and move on to the Nekros outpost,” Jarith said before placing the Dathomir bow into his belt.

“Sir,” Angeag started to ask before checking his rifle and turning to the others. “You heard him form up and get moving.”

 If the team had anything to say or may any indication of their disapproval Jarith did not notice as her turned towards the ruined fortress and began to walk. The dark side of the force seemed to cling to every crumbled wall and every ruined edifice of the fortress, far more than the rest of the already force saturated planet. An eerie green light seemed to hang over everything stretching out from the fortress before fanning out into the Dathomir swamps like the web of a gigantic spider.

“Come,” a sinister feminine voice said in his mind. “Join us,” It continued before mockingly before fading into sickly sweet laughter.