*”Approaching Ol’val station, mistress Sroka. Please fasten seatbelts for landing,”* the soothingly pleasant vocalizer of the LekMaster 5000’s droid-pilot announced as the curved ship swooped around a cluster of idly spinning asteroids and headed towards the glittering force field of Ol’val’s main hangar. Sitting inside the cockpit, the purple Twi’lek buckled in while tapping in her identifier code for the port authority with one lek and adjusted the volume of the onboard stereo with the other.

“You alright back there?” Tali hollered into the cramped cargo-*cum*-passenger compartment where a rather space-sick looking Bothan with dried vomit on his whiskers held on for dear life.

“Y-yes, urp, but please, could you have your droid fly straight for one second?!” the man cried out, covering his mouth with his hand mid-sentence as another bout of sickness rose within him. Thankfully, he’d already vacated his stomach of all its contents after their departure and was left dry heaving like a cat trying to pass a particularly stubborn hairball.

“I’m sorry! But I didn’t program the droidt!” Tali replied, omitting the fact she’d specifically asked for a pilot droid that could handle a bit more than level flight. What she hadn’t known, at the time of purchase, was that this droid seemed to know everything BUT level.

The Port Authority cleared their arrival a few moments later, the security having been stepped up significantly in the wake of Whallatta’s invasion, and Tali gave the go-ahead for the droid to being their landing when the scanners gave a sudden proximity alert from their aft.

*“Warning! Warning! Proximity alert! Brace for impact!”*

Tali did not even have time to voice her surprise before a dull *thump* echoed inside the ship as something hard, yet not substantial, collided with the ship’s aft. The impact was jarring, shaking the control column in her hands, but the droid brain swiftly corrected their course and resumed on the approach vector towards the glittering entrance.

A second *thump* followed, the proximity alert continuing to blare as the Bothan raised his concerns. “Ma’am? Begging your pardon, but what the frak is going o…?!” his voice was cut off by a bout of violent sickness as it seemed his guts had found a new, hitherto untapped source of vomit.

“I don’t know!” Tali screamed back, sweat beading down her lekku as the sheer rock face of Ol’val loomed perilously close to the ship’s viewports. Whatever it was that was colliding with them, it was clearly trying to get them killed. Switching on the remote controls for the turreted laser cannons and ignoring the warning from the Port Authority official for activating her weapons suite so close to port, she swiveled the guns around to see what was attacking them.

What the grainy holo-feed from the gun cameras could show was shocking to say the least. A pair of what looked like giant metallic beach balls were repeatedly slamming into her ship with reckless abandon, their efforts clearly synchronized as was evident by the rhythmic banging upon the ship’s superstructure. Brushing aside the myriad of questions this raised, Tali flipped the safety off and fired.

She only got a single shot off, the dual blast going wide of its mark, before the two drones stopped their attack and unleashed a pair of ion shots into the LekMaster’s engines. Lurching forward in her pilot’s chair as the ship suddenly decelerated from the lack of thrust, she felt a wave of nausea and helplessness flow over her as the ship’s systems overloaded and the entire freighter began to ‘float’ aimlessly around Ol’val’s gravity well.

“Sithspit! What in the blazes was THAT?! I thought you said you were going to keep me safe!” Harlon Gantz cried out as he wiped more sick from his whiskers, though the effort proved as futile as the previous ten times he’d done so.

“I… don’t know…” Tali admitted. “Ve got hit by a pair of ion shots or…” The ship lurched suddenly to the side as another loud *thump* sounded from the outside, followed by another and another. “Vhat the…?” Tali peered out through the viewports as the pair of drones began to bang themselves against the ship’s hull and slowly, but surely altered its trajectory further away from the entry point. Furrowing her brow, she watched the glittering sanctuary of the force field slip away as their orbit brought them around to the belly of the asteroid colony’s underside.

For a moment the banging stopped, but then resumed in a more frantic beat as it seemed the two drones suddenly felt a dire need to gain entrance into the small ship. Bulkheads groaning and the front screens cracking as armor plates buckled and bent, the only thought beyond sheer terror in Tali’s mind was that she should not have skimped on the extended warranty.

The pounding finally ceased as the ship was sent drifting towards the asteroid proper, lazily swirling around its axis. As massive cold bulk of the asteroid’s rocky face filled the LekMaster’s viewports, Tali tugged her lekku against her body and whispered a soft prayer to the Force to accept her while the Bothan had grown suspiciously silent. Just as she suspected to hear the horrible crunch of the LekMaster being torn against the Ol’val’s uncaring surface, she was surprised to feel the unmistakable sensation of slight vertigo as the ship passed through a force field and was snatched up by a tractor beam.

Her shock at not being smeared across Ol’val’s underbelly momentarily overwhelming her, Tali could do little more than blink in stupefied perplexion at the two beach ball drones that now filled her view as the LekMaster was being hauled aft-first down a freshly dug corridor inside the asteroid by a carefully operated tractor beam. Upon closer inspection, she saw the drones had what amounted to a single ‘eye’ in their centers and as she stared at them, the other ‘blinked’.

A moment later, it blinked again.

Acting more out of instinct than rational thought, Tali raised her hand and waved at it. The drone responded immediately with what she could have called an excited twirl around its axis and blinked a few more times before the LekMaster suddenly halted as a pair of docking clamps grabbed hold of the ship and moored it in place.

The drone outside her viewport blinked again and motioned to the left as if ‘nodding’. It was where the ship’s exit was located.

“You vant me to… come outside?” Tali spoke up, although the inch-thick armored glass panel separating her from the drone made any actual hearing impossible.

Somehow, the drone seemed to understand and nodded, repeating the gesture.

“Umh, no offence, but I vould’t rather not,” Tali muttered as she began unstrapping herself from the cockpit chair.

The drone’s response was swift and persuasive as a cluster of panels opened in its sides, a concussion missile rack, two heavy blaster cannons and what she for a moment thought was a giant energy slingshot popping out and pointing squarely at her while a red beam focused in between her lekku.

The drone repeated its suggestion.

“Erm, right. I, uh, neededt to stretch my legs anyway…” she muttered as she gingerly got up from her seat and hollered for the Bothan to open the hatch and get out.

A few short vomit-scented moments later the pair was out and standing on a hastily constructed access ramp which led up to a freshly mined cliff face with illumination strips guiding their way up and into a mining tunnel. Glancing back at the drones that kept a close eye on them, Tali realized their odds of survival were not good if they decided to resist.

Sighing, she turned to Harlon and lowered her voice so they hopefully wouldn’t hear. “Listen, ve’ll just play along for now, but vhen I give the signal, ve’ll make a run for it. Ve are inside Ol’val, so if ve manage to escape, there is a goodt chance ve can findt our vay back to safer zones.”

“Safe? SAFE?! You call this Safe!” Harlon snapped, blowing her cover in an outburst of spacesick temper. “I’ve just about had it with you and your…”

A piercing electronic scream silenced him as they both dropped to their knees with hands clutched against their heads to dampen the audible agony. The wail ended as abruptly as it had begun and a pulse of light moved along the strip towards the tunnel. It seemed their dallying was not appreciated.

“J-just, play along. I’ll figure something out,” Tali muttered and offered a well-meaning smile, but the Bothan had had enough of her and Voidbreaker.

“This is the last damn time I decide to defect the Inquisitorius! Ugh!” Harlon grunted as he began stomping his way towards the tunnel with Tali in tow.

Wading into the scantily illuminated mining tunnel, the pair left the two drones behind and for a moment, Tali considered what odds they might have if she drew her saber and started cutting a way out. They weren’t being escorted, as such, but considering the manner of planning and forethought their captor had put into getting them here, she figured there would be some sort of failsafe in place for that too.

She did not have much time to ponder her odds when the tunnel widened into a chamber filled with a hodgepodge of machinery, junk and artistic debris. Several platforms rose up over the cavalcade of clutter with massive grabbing arms descending from high above to grab and manipulate the seemingly random pieces of refuse with a surprising amount of care.

“Vhat the…?” Tali muttered, her gaze panning the chamber of what looked like the collected industrial scrap heap of Ol’val since its founding. Her eyes finally wandered up to a high platform some thirty feet above them where a giant chair stood with its back turned against them.

“[SALUTATIONS UPON ARRIVAL INTO MINE MINE!]” the mechanical voice was accented by a surprisingly sophisticated series of growls as the chair swiveled around to face Tali and Harlon.

“Y-you?!” Tali gasped in shock as she saw the familiar grey coat of a Wookiee, complete with a white patch running over his eye like a scar. “Kelviin?!”

The Wookiee let out a soft chuckle, its hand idly stroking a bundle of trussed up strands which Tali realized was a mop head. “[GRATITUDE ON BEHALF FOR CONVEYANCE OF DATA AND HOLDER]” Kelviin’s mechanical voice declared, the sound emanating from within the tangled innards of the mop head. “[ASSISTANCE MOST FAVORABLE!]”

As he spoke, one of the giant claws descended from the roof and grabbed the Bothan by the scruff of his neck, hoisting him up and dragging him squirming and squealing over to Kelviin’s side. The Wookiee gave a dismissive gesture and the arm began to shake the poor informant as loose change and pocket lint tumbled from his person, along with a few globs of half-congealed spew and, crucially, the data disk.

“Heelp! HEEEELP! Get me out of here!” Harlon cried out as his possessions were scattered over the floor.

“[CONSUMATE!]” the Wookiee exclaimed exuberantly before pausing and tapping on his mop-vocalizer and trying again. “[CONSUMMATE! PRECISELY AS MASTER IS REQUIRED!]”

Tali closed her eyes and tried to wrap her head around what was going on. Surely, she was dreaming, or hallucinating, or something. But no matter what she did to try and figure out what could have happened, it still did not make a lick of sense to her and she had to accept, for the moment, that this was in fact a thing which was happening and she was being double-crossed by Kelviin.

“Kelviin! I don’t know vhat your angle here is, but let the Bothan go andt ve can talk about this like adults. Or adolescents. Or vhatever you’re comfortable vith.”

“[HA-HA-HA-HA-HA]” the Wookiee synthetically chuckled, throwing a dismissive gesture her way. “[AM BEYOND TALKING! TIME FOR ACTION IS PRESENTLY! ADDENDUM, IMPOSSIBILITY ALLOWANCE OF ATTESTANT!]”

It took Tali a few long seconds of arduous deciphering to un-mangle the Wookiee’s words and realize the peril she was in and even in that moment the warning did not come from her own reasoning, but a chill flash up her spine. Throwing herself to the side as a giant mechanical arm swooped overhead with skull-crushing force, Tali rolled sideways and swiftly regained her footing.

“Kelviin! You stop this right away! Ve can talk about this!” Tali snapped, drawing her lightsaber.

“[PUNY JEDI UNABLE TO CEASE ME! MASTER PLAN OF MASTER IS BECOME ATTAINED!]” he cackled maniacally as another arm swept towards her in a wide arc, igniting a pair of plasma cutters that hissed and spat a violent blue beam of high-energy particles.

“Eeep!” Tali let the Force flow through her as she jumped up high, vaulting over the robotic armature as her saber ignited in a beam of gold. Her senses warned her of danger, but there was nothing she could do as another arm swung up and slammed into her, swatting her from the sky like a bug.

“UNNGH!” the Twi’lek grunted as she crashed into a pile of computer chips, her armor managing to prevent a majority of the lacerations, though she still felt several cuts all around her body from the silicon circuit boards. Groaning as she tried to clear her head, only the sharp warning cry from the Bothan saved her as she once again threw herself aside when the plasma laced manipulator arm slammed into the pile from above like the vengeful finger of God.

Scarpering over broken tech in a hurried and distinctly undignified manner, the Twi’lek dashed this way and that as she the pair of arms kept up their relentless assault, trying to snatch, squish or crush her in increasingly difficult to dodge ways. Pirouetting around just as another arm swiped at her, Tali brought her saber up as she stumbled backwards. Falling head over heels over the lip of a debris pile, her saber met the mechanical arm at a ball join as she herself plummeted down the reverse slope. Yellow plasma bit into durasteel in a shower of sparks and the heavy grabber claw became undone, careening across the chamber and into the cavern wall.

*CRACK!*

If she had ever wondered what it sounded like to be inside an egg before it was cracked, she now had the answer as the sickening sound of fracturing stone filled the chamber. All motion seemed to cease in that instant before the sound of rushing air filled the silence and loose debris began to suck out towards the crack.

“[EXCREMENT…]” Kelviin vocalized in a breathless tone as his fur billowed in the wind.

Suddenly forgetting all about his attempts at Twi’lek murder, the Wookiee jumped off his platform and ran towards the growing crack, pulling out some sort of bottle from his tool belt and leaping into the thick of the debris stream. Tali watched in amazement as Kelviin sprayed a light blue foam into the air which was immediately sucked into the forming crack and seemed to solidify in an instant.

Almost as soon as the danger had appeared, it had been handled as the Wookiee busied himself with patching up his repair, now fully engrossed in his work and leaving the arms dangling uselessly from the ceiling. Not wasting this golden opportunity, Tali dug herself out from beneath spare droid parts and dashed towards him, drawing her blaster pistol and setting it to stun before pelting the walking carpet with a trio of stun bolts.

Kelviin roared in protest, struggling to stay upright, but ultimately falling prey to the relentless assault and collapsing onto his knees. Yet, even as he did so, the Wookiee turned to look at her with a look she had never seen upon him; malice.

“[AM LOSE THIS ROTATION, BUT MASTER PLAN WILL BECOME WHOLE!]” he declared spitefully as he raised a thermal detonator over his head.

Tali stopped in her tracks, palms splayed at him. “Vhoa there, Kelviin. Let’s not get carriedt away here…” she muttered disarmingly as she waved her hand in a gentle motion. “Just put the grenade down…”

The Wookiee hesitated, his expression melting into a more docile one as the mind control made his arm sag. Tali forced the suggestion to make him stop his lunacy, when she noticed a faint spark in his neck and a jolt shook the Wookiee’s frame. The next moment, he shook his head and raised the detonator high once again.

“[JEDI MAGIC WEAK! MASTER MORE STRONG! MAKE KELVIIN MORE STRONG!]”

“Vhat master?! Vhat the frak are you on about?!” Tali snapped as she ceased her attempts to push the suggestion through.

“[MASTER IS SMARTEST MALE! MUCH SMARTEST THAN JEDI. HE SEES ALL, KNOWS ALL!]” the Wookiee craned his neck back and let out a defiant roar.

Something had seriously scrambled the Wookiee’s mind and as he let out his victorious growl, Tali noticed a minute patch of shaved fur at the base of his skull with a laser cauterized scar barely visible. It was roughly where she’d just seen the faint flash coming from and in a moment of desperation, she acted.

Reaching out with the Force to grab the grenade in the Wookiee’s hand, she shunted the device down with all her might. Kelviin had not anticipated this at all as the orb suddenly felt substantially heavier and slammed into the top of his head. A wavering groan spilled from the Wookiee’s lips as he slumped unconscious upon the floor and the grenade rolled from his grasp, blinking with a dangerous red light.

Her control still extended upon it, Tali telekinetically flung the detonator across the room in a wide arc, managing to land it amidst a pile of loose debris which promptly vanished in a flash of heat and overpressure. The entire cavern shook from the explosion, one of the mechanical arms coming loose from its moorings and crashing down and almost pulping the Bothan in the process as both Tali and Harlon covered in a futile effort to protect themselves.

The tremors finally ceasing, no further leaks having been sprung and everyone still demonstrably alive, Tali hurried up to Kelviin’s side and inspected the scar. Gently prodding his skin, she felt something foreign beneath the tough hide and sighed, pulling out a knife as she prepared to make an incision. Suppressing the slight shudder of disgust, she pressed the knife into his neck and drew a cut into Kelviin’s neck. The flesh parted with a tugging resistance as the blade passed through hide and meat until a wide-enough hole had been created for Tali’s fingers to slip through.

“I’m really sorry about this, Kelviin…” Tali sighed as she dug her fingers into the wound and felt around to find what she had been suspecting. With a stomach-churning sensation of tearing tissues, she tugged at the object and ripped it out. Fingers slick with Wookiee blood, she pulled out a small chip from the base of his cranium. The chip flashed once as it tried to register a connection before abruptly heating up. Acting instinctively, Tali lobbed the device away from them as it went off like a firecracker, showering the air with cloud of sparks as it blew up. Had it done so within the Wookiee’s neck, Arcona might have been short a mechanic.

Limping towards them after having squirmed out from the robotic arm’s grasp and recovering his data disk, Harlon ran an exhausted hand through his matted mane and sighed. “Took you long enough!”

“Andt I’m sorry, but he’s my friendt. I don’t have a habit of killing friendts,” Tali retorted as she stood up and gingerly burned the wound shut with the tip of her lightsaber.

“Friend? Jeeze! Who needs enemies…” Harlon groaned and shook his head. “Ugh, nevermind. Let’s just… get out of here.”

“Just a minute, I think he’s coming to…” Tali muttered as she kept cradling Kelviin’s head in her lap, blaster pistol aligned with his neck in a very subtle manner, just in case. “Hello there, Kelviin. Feeling more like yourself?”

“Arooo…” the Wookiee groaned, looking much out of it, but seemingly docile. Handing him the mop head, Tali watched him recalibrate the vocalizer and trying again.

“[AM NO REMEMBER IS WHAT HAPPEN. FINAL THING REMEMBER, BLUE SKIN, RED EYES…]” he muttered.

“So this is actually his Sane self?! Ugh, can we just get back to Ol’val now?” Harlon groaned, tapping his foot on the cold steel flooring expectantly. “He looks like he needs some help too, though.”

Glacing back at the Wookiee who kept holding his head and groaning in pain, she recalled those wise words from her totally-not-boyfriend. “Oh, oh right… Koliss always saidt not to perform open-cranial surgery vithout vashing your hands first. -- Ve’d better get him to a hospital.”

As they helped the disoriented Wookiee back to his feet and limped towards the inner parts of Ol’val, Tali tried to recall the symbol she had seen on the chip’s cover, a stylized letter R orbited by electrons like an atom. She knew she had seen that symbol somewhere before, but where. And what had Kelviin said about blue skin and red eyes?