

## Badlands

The Tie Defender skidded across the bleach white death-scape of Nancora's derelict and forgotten Badlands region. Torn into pieces, solar panels wrecked and strewn across hundreds of yards, Mauro Wynter struggled to pull himself from the cockpit. Restling himself out of the hatch, he luckily was able to wiggle free. Nothing. The sheer nothingness around him blanketed him in despair. Adrenaline, however, kept his senses acute and his muscles singing.

He knew instantly the survival and victory of his allies was the prerequisite for his own salvation. If the Collective was defeated and Nancora occupied the chance of a rescue mission was strong. If not...his best odds were to find civilization and attempt to blend in with the Collective civilian populace and go to ground. That was in a perfect world, and Wynter knew that was the rarest of worlds he had ever encountered.

The margins of survival dwindled rapidly, however. As he walked helplessly across the barren, dust covered wreckage field of the Badlands in the distance, distorted by sand swells, came the telling lights of a pack of speeders. These had to be enemy forces, what clandestine Iron Throne forces that were inserted on Nancora would surely not be diverted for a lowly mercenary. He was able to hide amongst the ruins of an ancient freighter when he glanced the six feminine and angular framed combatants. The tell-tale blue hue of a Chiss female was in the lead, with five Kiffars spreading out in all directions, bows in hand.

Wynter took quick stock of his bail-out bag. Water, rations, a datapad, and a flare gun were his only possessions save for his two blasters. He chuckled silently to himself, thinking how his flight suit would be poor camouflage and nearly useless in a firefight. He could hide, he could run, or he could fight. Dying alone in this hellish land was not his choice. The element of surprise could assist, however. He grabbed the datapad and flung it like a disk towards the nearest Kiffar.

The agility and skill that the Kiffar knocked the datapad out of the air was impressive if it were not for the two blaster bolts that took her in the sternum. The four remaining Kiffars hit the deck, looking for their assailant. Only the Chiss did not move, she turned towards the direction of fire and walked calmly as she raised her bow. She began to point in Wynter's direction when he deftly plunged the charge into the flare gun and shot it directly at her. The flashing light was utterly blinding as it was nearly futile.

Kinetic energy bolts range out in rapid succession in every direction as the phosperous continued to spill from the flare. Wynter's helmet shielded his view, allowing him to roll to the left and rapidly stream fire onto the nearest Kiffar. Four against one were not perfect odds, but it was a start. Surprise was now gone and a violent fire fight ensued. One well aimed shot from a distant Kiffar took Wynter in the left leg, sending him sprawling headlong. Now prone, the mercenary pulled the trigger in rapid succession and took another Kiffar down at the knees.

The pain in his leg was crippling. He simply could not stand up. His heads-up display showed two Kiffar but no Chiss. Kneeling, Wynter was able to shoot down another Kiffar who ran headlong at him, vibrostaff in hand. Another kinetic arrow took him in the hand, blaster spiraling away. The additional pain barely registered as the remaining Kiffar grappled with him. Knucklers pounding against his chest, Wynter was pinned down as he was able to discharge an energized bolt from his bryar pistol. With his good leg he kicked her body off of his own. Where was the Chiss?

He scanned the area, Kiffar bodies strewn about. "Stand down. You have done well. My orders are to take you alive" came the raspy voice. Looking upward, he saw the Chiss standing on the wreckage, bow notched and leveled at his head. Wynter dropped his weapon. "I yield."