

It smelled of smoke and burning and soiled garments. For that last reason alone, Kordath Bleu was attempting to not admit that he was awake. He just wanted to sit in his overstuffed chair, pretending to still be asleep while suffering from his hangover-induced headache. Zuji would surely change Shay'Ira if he waited long enough. As the minutes dragged on, and he felt his little girl grow restless against him — in a chest carrier, that was new — he slowly creaked open an eyelid.

Then he opened both and stared at the demolished interior of the escape pod. He was not in his comfy chair, nor was he in his home. Bleu shifted in the crash harness, blinking slowly and looking around with mouth agape. The movement against his chest shocked him out of his dumbstruck stupor, remembering that Shay was strapped in with him. He struggled to unhook the unfamiliar crash webbing and the chest carrier, wondering where his daughter had gotten such a strange frakking hat — honestly, who put a beanie with fluffy ears on his kid? — when they had a perfectly good knitted one that Tali had made them...

"You ain't mine," he rasped out, his mouth dry. The child he held before him lacked the tell-tale signs of her mixed Zeltron and Ryn heritage. For one, the child was more tannish than pink, the hair was dark, and the nose was decidedly Human. "Oh kark, Sammy?"

He stared at the child, her big, almond-shaped eyes looking so much more innocent than her mother's. Hazy, half-remembered scenes flashed through his mind as he blankly looked around the trashed escape pod. Finding a clear spot, he put the baby carrier down and moved towards one of the other strapped-in occupants. A quick check, slapping the man wearing a mechanic's jumpsuit across the face and a few fingers laid across the throat, confirmed his worries. Another glance around the inside of the pod gave him pause.

Half a dozen naval personnel hung from crash webbing, most with their heads hanging at unnatural angles or, he tried to not pay too much attention, missing them entirely.

'Well, we was bleedin' lucky, Sammy. Yer mum would wreck me if we'd died in tha crash.'

Ignoring the questionable logic, he rummaged through the wreck and gathered what he thought might be useful. He moved on to cut the straps of one of the naval officers who looked to have a clean uniform on. Apologizing to the dead ensign, he peeled the man's uniform off and laid it out on the filthy, debris-ridden floor. Pulling the man's undershirt off and muttering a short prayer he'd picked up on some world or another, he went and unloaded Sammy from her carrier.

The Ryn didn't balk at what came next; he had a little girl of his own after all. The soiled diaper was tossed out the nearest rent-open portion of the pod, and he did his best to use the uniform to clean her. She squirmed and cried, all the while Kord tried to comfort and coo to her in a low voice. The roughness of the material likely was causing her distress, and while the child was familiar with him, this wasn't usually one of the adults that dealt with this.

He glanced at the small pile he'd put together from digging around the pod; the canteen of water would probably be important. He rubbed away the child's filth as best he could, attempting to be gentle. They needed the water more for hydration, probably. Content that he'd done what he could, he wrapped the dead man's undershirt up in a makeshift diaper and redressed Sammy in her little jumper and hat, hoping it'd be sufficient to keep the sun off of her.

From somewhere in the pod a noise came, startling the Ryn enough that he nearly dropped his charge as he struggled to put the baby carrier back on. Some small debris shifted, and out of it came an ID9 droid, shaking off dust and wiring like a wet Loth Cat. The Ryn let out a sigh of relief, thinking that the local wildlife had already shown up to make his life hell.

"Good ta see yer still scuttlin', Skitters," he said with a small smile as the probe droid teetered over to him. It clung to his pant leg and used the pincers on its tiny arms to clamber up to his shoulder, red eye swiveling about with curiosity. It let out a concerned chirp when the baby began to fuss, prompting Kord to lean his head down and coo at her, his hand coming up to waggle his slim fingers in her face as a distraction. Slowly the child calmed, and Kord looked out of the pod to the barren wastes and swirling dust and sand that made up Nancora.

"Bollocks," he muttered, flipping up the hood of his cloak and trying to close up his coat around the carrier. It wasn't elegant, but it would keep most of the elements off of the kiddo. He shoved his loot into his pockets; the canteen went to his belt, the ration bars and datapad into his coat. The flare gun he stared at, reasonably confident he knew how it worked and tucked it in the back of his belt.

Looking out the rent in the side of the escape pod, he sighed. No doubt Collective forces were already inbound, having tracked the pod down. They still controlled the ground, to the best of his knowledge, which meant friendly recovery was going to be unlikely. He looked down at Sammy and sighed.

"Well, lil one, looks like it's you and me till we find someplace safe. No point hangin' about waitin' ta get captured. Do nae think these Collective kark ups will be nice keepers."

He stepped out of the pod, holding his cloak tight around himself and the precious cargo strapped to his chest. The wind whipped up sand and dust, the Badlands stretching out before him. Rocky outcroppings dotted the landscape, an opportunity for brief moments of shade, he decided, as he tried to plot a course. He scratched his head and turned in a slow circle, shrugging helplessly and picking a direction. Staying at the pod would just get him captured.

Picking the nearest rock formation, he set off, having decided that higher ground would offer a better vantage. It worked in the hologames, he thought, why not here? As he trudged along, incapable of determining how far his target was in the harsh, beating sunlight, he thought back to the last thing he could recall.

They'd entered the star system, Nancora hanging ahead of the fleet like a ball of dirt. An ugly planet, not the kind that the Ryn wanted to visit, he'd decided. Attack plans had been drawn up; the ship captains knew the plans for breaching the blockade and landing troops. He and the Shadow Lady had decided to back off for the time being; neither of them were familiar with large-scale tactics, after all.

So, in an effort to be good leaders, they'd taken a hands-off approach and allowed their officers to do their jobs without the politicians around. Satsi had shrugged it off with a 'this is what they're here for, right?' and Kordath had never understood the predisposition of 'they have the Force, let them lead the military.' They had people who'd trained for this, who'd been educated and had experience. Anything the two of them did would just compromise the assault.

They'd done what they considered completely logical: gathered a few other non-essential personnel that Bleu had vouched for as 'being cool' and set up in an officer's lounge. To pass the time until things all blew over, they'd broke out the sabacc cards and borrowed heavily from the bar. The drink had flowed, and Kord found himself owing an ensign from the Engineering department of the ship his next month's pay. He winced, thinking back to the man he'd stripped to give Sammy a makeshift diaper. That was a bet he wasn't going to have to pay off.

He rubbed at his temple as he dragged his feet through the dust and racked his brain. Things got hazy after that. Flashes of memories came and went, and he chased them to ignore his current situation. On occasion, he'd reach down to stroke Sammy's cheek and whisper calming words to the child.

One memory stood out, making his tail swing behind him in both agitation and amusement. The very clear image of his boss sitting in his lap, as she was want to do when they got to drinking, coalesced in his mind. Her jacket was gone, and she was pouring drinks down...

He smacked his lips, suddenly aware of the sticky sweetness, stale as it might be on his tongue. A look at his chest prompted him to feel a bit wrong at his recollections.

"Yer ma' is a fun lass, Sammy, but do nae grow up and give yer best mate body shots in front of yer underlin's, eh?"

The infant burred at him incoherently, her face already getting a shade of red from the constant sunlight. He rearranged his cloak to cover her better, worried still about the heat itself. A quick check showed their destination to be depressingly far off still. He tried to tell from the shadows and sun how long he'd been walking and came up empty. Muttering about the need to start carrying a chrono, he continued on.

Something was still bothering him; where had Sammy popped up from? Why had he ended up in an escape pod with her? Where the frak was Satsi? He had a vague thought that perhaps she'd sent for the child at some point, not having trusted anyone to watch her on Selen while

they were gone. If Satsi had had one of her 'episodes', it may have been Kordath who'd had the little girl brought up from the nursery to calm her down.

The ship must have been put in peril for them to have loaded up on an escape pod. Why the baby carrier was on him, he couldn't remember. Too many unanswered questions for the Ryn's peace of mind as he bounced the infant, who began to fuss.

"Bit further, lass, we'll get ta some shade and take a break, yeah? Unca Kordy is here ta keep ya safe. Do nae worry," he spoke through cracked lips, craving the precious water that resided in their canteen. The shadows began to stretch out from the rock formations that dotted the vista, and the Proconsul made for the nearest patch of darkness. He sighed in genuine appreciation when he entered the cover, the heat abating almost immediately. He felt Sammy shift in her carrier and looked down in time to catch the tiny person's yawn.

Fighting off his own tiredness, the Ryn stumbled onwards. Shelter, they needed an overhang or a cave, something they could hide out in and rest. The elements were a bigger threat to the child he had under his protection than the Collective forces. At least troops he could fight, if he had to. As the sun sank, the temperature dropped. Not as much as a proper desert, but the chill was still setting in, even with the cloak and coat. He felt Sammy shiver against him, the infant lacking the energy even to cry.

"Tis okay, Sammy me luv, we'll be fine," he rasped out, stopping in his tracks to kneel. Struggling with the straps, he freed her from the carrier and pulled his cloak off, trying to ignore the biting wind. Wrapping the child up in it, he hoped it would keep her warm as he hugged her to his chest, hunching his head down and returning to the walk. He glanced back the way he'd come, seeing the path he was leaving in the dust and sand, sighing again in the fading twilight. Far, far in the distance, he could see the barest hint of the escape pod's crash site. Feeling somewhat confident that he'd made some progress, he keyed his comlink and began cycling through Arconan frequencies, and whatever Lotus ones he could recall. Perhaps someone who'd been friendly to the Resistance was out here.

It was almost an effort to stay warm, sending out call after call for aid. No one answered. Static or broken up words were all he managed. He paused from time to time to give Sammy a bit of water from the canteen, taking a sip himself for every few he gave her. The most water he took for himself was when he'd take a chunk of ration bar and chew it up finely, swishing a mouthful of liquid with it to make it soft. Using a tried and true method from avian species the galaxy over, he fed the infant to keep her strength up.

He felt hazy in the head, dizzy and getting confused when he found himself facing a wall of rock. It confounded him for a full minute; it was the first solid object to stand in his path for hours. He began to try and find a way around it, before remembering that this place had been a goal and started to search for an alcove or cave instead. Success was a surprise; a shallow cave hollowed out by wind or water, he wasn't sure, but it got them out of the harsh elements.

Bundling Sammy up in his coat over the cloak, he leaned against one of the walls, exhausted. He wasn't sure how long he slept, the crying of the baby eventually waking him. Prepping more ration bar and feeding the child, he stared out into the darkness, still tired yet feeling...strange in the head. Rationality whispered it was dehydration and a lack of food. Irrationality shouted that the child would get all the water and rations, that his safety was secondary. It made sense from a certain point of view; gods only knew what would happen if something happened to the girl and Satsi found him again.

So he sat watch, staring out the alcove, feeding and checking on Sammy and staying awake. His eyes were wide with adrenaline and misguided intentions, suffering from hunger, dehydration and heat stroke. At some point in the early hours, when the sun peeked over the horizon, he removed his trousers and set about doing what seemed natural.

So it was, that the huntresses and their leader, the Chiss known as Kendra, tracked their prey they found the Ryn with his head down near his inner thigh. They sat in stunned silence as the bloodshot-eyed Arconan dragged his tongue across his fur before Icasta cleared her throat.

Kordath looked up, tongue lolling out, eyes staring wildly and features slack. His gaze took in the group of women, and he straightened up to a sitting posture, much to the distress of several of the huntresses.

"Ladies! Welcome to my cave!"

"Were you just....oh shadows, oh no."

He threw a delirious wink towards the Chiss. "Aye, flexible I am."

That's all he managed before the electro-whip encircled in his neck and the woman jabbed the activation button so hard her knuckles turned white. The shock put him down, twitching and unconscious.

"Was...was he grooming himself!?"

"Was he hitting on us?"

"Good stars, what's that noise?"

"Ma'am, I found a baby."

Kendra pinched the bridge of her nose and growled.

"Load them both up, maybe the child is important. I doubt the...what is this thing?"

"A Ryn, ma'am. They're usually vagrants and thieves."

"Who knows, maybe he'll have a value, bring him along too."

So it was that Kordath and Sammy were loaded into a Collective speeder, for parts unknown.