The cracked and sundered landscape of the hostile Nancora lay stretched before him. High orbit flashed periodically with vibrant greens and reds. These colors melded into a sorrowful orange as pieces began to hit the atmosphere. Through the haze he could just barely make out his end goal, a skyline of metal that itself had begun to be wrapped in flashes of vibrant colors. In the distance, a dust cloud that seemed to cover the entire horizon was growing bigger with every second.

Koliss wiped his brow. The dull grey fabric of his armor was now starting to burn him through the armor. He had been standing in the same place for a while now. His target seemed so far away. His whole body ached and yearned for him to lie down and sleep.

Koliss tried to rub away the dust that blasted his eyes. He tried to quiet his mind to prepare himself for what would be a depressingly long trek.

‘*Star-scorched sky, it rains upon the skin, what a wonderful day for the tide to come in.’*

The first few thoughts of home, old poetry included emerged clearly; of the cooling tides and snowcapped mountains he recalled fondly. They always were a welcome thought in such times as he lost himself slightly in his recollection.

He never did hear the sound of stun baton activating.

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“Hunt Master, our prey has been captured. He gave no struggle”

Kendra Icasta’s smirk threatened to turn sorrowful for a mere moment before she schooled her features and answered her comm.

“Good, I am in route. Prepare him for questioning.”

“At once.”

To the point, as all Shikari should. Kendra motioned to her own retinue of hunters and the group was soon moving swiftly across the blasted landscape of Nancora. They had spotted the emergency flare quite quickly in their movement into the area of the escape pod. Not the smartest thing for their quarry to do, as it was a desperation move, but not unexpected.

‘*This mustn’t be anyone important, if they were only able to last this long.*’ Kendra’s thoughts were her only true companion as the Shikari moved. She had been exhilarated to have been given a target to hunt. Not just any target at that, but one of those impertinent Brotherhood bastards. She felt crestfallen at the fact that they had been searching for only a few hours before their quarry had been found.

Ghafa Ordam herself had given the order to hunt; a singular escape pod that had been damaged by their naval forces. There was a chance of catching one of Brotherhood’s leaders and making an example of them!

The Chiss lead group soon came upon their fellow Shikari, and a singular figure that was knelt in submission at the edge of a cliff face overlooking a wide landscape. An array of equipment was laid out before the human man, as she could now make out the features, a selection of odds and ends with a strange number of blasters.

Kendra’s disappointment reared its head again. There was nothing among this sight to indicate this prisoner was a force user, or even that much of a threat. She had allowed herself to become wrapped up in the hunt all for nothing. The man also didn’t have the look of someone with too much importance to the brotherhood. He looked rather ridiculous with his urban grey camouflage armor that stood out immensely against the backdrop of the badlands.

“Let me speculate…” Kendra began speaking to the assembled group, “You were told you could win honor and glory in this little escapade of the Brotherhood yes? Maybe you are here for some ideal of altruism, or maybe you’re just here for the credit payout?” Kendra drew out her words and began circling the kneeling human. She would draw whatever pleasure she could out of this scrapped hunt.

“Tell me, what sweet words did those force wielders twist to get you into such a sorry state? Or is this sullen silence simply your natural state of simpering being?” There was a light chortle from the surrounded Shikari; and an ever so slight twitch of the mouth from the human.

‘*Good, he can be prodded.*’ Kendra thought as she kept eyes focused, looking for any more tells of frustration.

Kendra waited for a moment until it was clear that was all the human doctor had nothing to say. It didn’t matter, as he would be talking soon enough. She turned her attention to the equipment that had apparently been confiscated from him before her arrival.

A collection of blasters of various makes caught her eye first; the human certainly seemed armed for combat, but he had given up without a fight? There was an assortment of medical items as well, namely a medpac and what appeared to be an opened stim kit with one of the syringes in the open; An attempt to inject himself when he was captured perhaps? The last item that gave her any real pause was some sort of bag with sand that seemed to glint in the sunlight. An interesting choice, though she wasn’t sure of the purpose just yet.

Her biggest draw however was the lack of any survival equipment. Two ration bars, a small canteen and a datapad that looked freshly destroyed by a blaster were all that remained about how this human planned to escape from the badlands. She decided to see which other buttons this human hated being pushed.

“You really aren’t that smart are you?” Kendra smirked as the human’s mouth turned into a grimace; right on the button it would seem.

“That escape pod must have had more to sustain one person for a few days, don’t tell me this was all you could salvage?” Further silence from the human, but now his entire body seem to tense.

Kendra allowed a chuckle to escape “No, even the Brotherhood isn’t even that incompetent. You must have simply…forgotten?” A flinch so slight it would be missed, but not by Kendra’s eyes.

“Should have expected that.” It was quiet, almost ashamed, but she was sure she heard this ‘Koliss’ speak.

“What was that doctor? You locked up under pressure there; you’ll need to speak up.”

“I don’t think I will, what’s the point against Technocrat tech?” Koliss finally raised his head to look at Kendra. There was more defiance in his eyes than she would have initially guessed. She tiled her head, curious as to what point the human was trying to make.

“That baleful eyes of yours, whatever else you and this… tantalizing lot have hidden up your sleeves. It would only make sense for Techno hunters to have cybernetics to increase their efficiency in hunting right?”

The human seemed to be delirious, speaking in a random tangent as the other Shikari seemed confused at his words. To Kendra it seemed off; it was roundabout to be sure, but the tone and the implication was all there. She didn’t appreciative it at all.

Kendra quickly closed the gap between herself and Koliss, firmly taking a hold of his neck and forcing him to look upward at her.

“I don’t think you rightly appreciate your situation, doctor. It’s lucky for you that appreciation can be learned quickly.” Even at her words, the defiance stood out clearly still in Koliss’ eyes. Kendra drew back a hand to strike and begin his lesson.

She was caught off guard as Koliss quickly jerked from her grasp and flicked his hands upward.

She felt a slight stinging pain that caused her to react audibly and pull away. Within moments a plethora of weapons were poised or pointed at the human’s body; the Shikari wished for the word from their master to simply end the prisoner’s life.

Quickly checking herself, she spotted a hypo-syringe that had been lodged into her leg, dangerously close to where an artery was. She wanted to growl in frustration; she had gotten complacent, sloppy even, and she allowed this to happen. She resolved to not allow her anger to show as she pulled out the syringe to examine it. Slightly larger than the syringe that had been laid out before, but still quite small that it could have been fitted into a fabric sleeve and hidden with little trouble.

What caught her attention though was that the syringe appeared dry. No sign of any liquid that it had supposedly held. In fact there were a few micro-fractures in the glass that would have made holding any liquid inside near impossible. There also no smell of any poisons that she had ever come across or worked with.

The thought process quickly came to Kendra. The human wanted to get her in close, but he didn’t have the time beforehand to prepare any actual dosage. She didn’t see the injection, only the after-effect. The doctor wanted her to think she had been injected with some mysterious substance, and a less observant hunter may have missed the telltale signs. Kendra Icasta was no ordinary hunter.

Her mind instantly switched to how to play this to her advantage. The doctor now thought himself to be somewhat in control. Kendra allowed some of her previous anger to filter onto her face as she turned to glower at their prisoner. He sat with a smirk of his own at Kendra’s look.

It would seem Kendra’s guess was correct as she spoke with a forced rush. “What was that injection worm?!” Koliss attempted to answer, but could barely squeeze out that response due to a Shikari boot against his neck.

“You want to… know…” Koliss stopped as he chocked any further respond. Kendra finally waved away the Shikari band as she wanted to find out what this human wanted, though the huntresses were reluctant to do so. Koliss spent the time gulping in the heat blasted air for a few seconds before answering.

“You…*huff…*want to…know? You kill me… you never get that. You take me alive to whomever order my capture, and then you get to know.” Koliss was a good liar Kendra thought, but not good enough to slip past her when she was focused only on his words. The tone was boisterous, but there was also a strain that went beyond his shortness of breath.

Kendra turned her back on Koliss as if an effort to think out the problem, motioning over two of the senior Shikari in the meantime.

She considered the costs and benefits of dragging this Brotherhood member back. He had mentioned being a contractor, so there was little chance he would be any significant long term intelligence source. However, he most likely had operational intelligence on the current invasion that the Collective might be able to act on. In that case it would be beneficial to just interrogate him here, but the possibility of Brotherhood forces catching them in the open and the encroaching dust storm worried her.

“Tick, tick, goes the chrono Chiss! That dust storm is waiting around!” Another surprise for Kendra the doctor recognized her distinct features; she turned to her Shikari companions.

“Take half of the band and search out for the escape pod crash site; ensure nothing of value is left behind.” Kendra spoke in a whisper. “The rest of us will escort this prisoner back to be interrogated.” The Shikari nodded, instantly moving to fulfill their orders, and soon the band had separated and had begun moving in separate directions.

Kendra had felt an urge to go after the escape pod as she figured that one landing could mean more, and that could mean a greater chance of a hunt. Still, she had a mission to complete in bringing her quarry to headquarters, and she was not about to allow herself to fail a mission now. Who knew, maybe they would run across a Brotherhood scouting party and she would get her fill of blood for the day.

Their trek back to Ghafa Ordam’s headquarters was a slow one, due to the injured state of their prisoner. He was fully restrained however, as Kendra wanted all precautions taken after her near slip up.

The dust storm’s presence grew further as it approached with an absolute fury behind it. It would appear the Shikari band and their prisoner would be caught up in it. The group had taken cover in a shallow cave system as Kendra decided to see just how bad the storm would get before deciding to push through or stay covered. Visibility dropped as dust began to swirl and kick up around the cave entrance. This didn’t matter to Knedra though. Her cybernetic eye was more than enough to cut through the on-rushing storm and allow her to keep watch while the rest of the band hid further inside the cave.

It was on this watch that Kendra saw something rather worrying; a full heat signature of what appeared to be some kind of landing or assault ship fly by fairly close, and heading in the direction that the Shikari had traveled from. She wasn’t able to tell markings, so she had no clue as to what this sighting could mean, but she figured it wasn’t much trouble for her and instead refocused on watching for any approaching threats.

“*Hunt mas…kari band re… we ar….ck!”* A garbled message broke Kendra from her thoughts, but it was the Shikari frequency being used, so she quickly tried to respond. Apparently her fellow hunters had been also caught in the storm.

“Your message was broken and unreadable, say again.” Her voice echoed in the cave over the storm.

“*We ha…he pod was no….otherhood is….”* The voice was barely heard, but there plenty of other key words that Kendra was able to pick out. The panic that could be heard only compounded her growing anger.

Stomping back into the cave, Kendra made a line for the prisoner. She kicked him awake from his nap and greeted with a haymaker across his face with her vibroknuckler. She gave Koliss no time to think as she pulled him by his grey armor close to her face as she shouted.

“What were you hiding at that escape pod!?” Koliss hesitated for a few more moments as Kendra waited impatiently. Her answer was a glob of blood spit up from Koliss, which earned him another hit from the vibroknuckler, this time to the sternum.

“A landing ship just passed us by. No pilot would be flying in this weather if they didn’t know exactly where to go! What is out there!?” Another punch across the doctor’s face emphasized her point.

Koliss chuckled through the blood quickly pooling in his mouth again as he tried to speak. “I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about.” Koliss was loopy and dazed from the hits; Kendra couldn’t make heads or tails of if he was telling the truth.

“What. Did. You. Hide!?” Kendra tried to force the point home, but Koliss just smiled sloppily.

“Tell me Chiss, do you believe in luck?” Kendra hesitated as she processed the statement. A chill went through her spine as she thought and her mind eventually turned toward the force.

A force user? That was what he was protecting? No, the Shikari would have found evidence of that. The landing ship… Kendra grimaced before finally letting go of Koliss. Her hands were not idle for long though as she soon went about punching the doctor for all she was worth.

The Shikari around her seemed satisfied to observe as Kendra soon went to work venting her frustrations on the prisoner. Her built anticipation to a hunt, her immediate dissatisfaction from this human surrendering without a fight, to her satisfaction in turning Koliss own desperate play for time against him which she now was realizing she had not actually turned against him.

He wasn’t trying to outsmart her, he was trying to stall her; and the communication she had just received had snapped that reality home.

She had, however slightly, been outplayed. That thought made her angry.

A few minutes of a sound beating later, Koliss lay unconscious as Kendra was panting from the effort she gave in delivering the beating.

Koliss slipped into his unconscious mind, a faint memory playing past his mind being the only sign that he still drew breath.

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*“You can’t be serious Welcott.”*

*“As serious as heat exhaustion Arlos, now quit you’re squirming.”*

*Koliss continued bandaging the wounded Selenian as best as he could; his hands were still shaking from the adrenaline surge. The doctor did a quick run through of the entire situation to keep his mind sharp. They had crash landed hard in their escape pod. His equipment had been spared the impact* *thankfully, but he had only managed to salvage a few survival packs and items from the pod.*

*There was also the other Arcona crew that had come down with him. All stuffed into a pod meant for far fewer than what the final number was. A few of them died on impact, the rest of them were worse for wear.*

*The deaths and injuries were on Koliss. His couldn’t let those crewmen suffer in a vaccum. Though it would seem like the crew’s fate wasn’t any better now than it was before; they had been signed to a slow death rather than a suffocating one.*

*Koliss decided he needed to fix this as best he could.*

*While the communication equipment had all been scrapped in the crash, his scout pack was still able to broadcast. It would be white noise, but using Brotherhood comms channels meant that it might be able to be traced. His scout pack also meant that the members of the escape pod would be covered for a survival for the time being with shelter and camouflage coverings, food and water that could be rationed on top of what came out of the pod.*

*That presented the problem of being on an enemy world. Koliss could not begin to guess that as to what kind of party the enemy might send out to find the escape pods from the Brotherhood fleet, if they sent any searches at all. Koliss knew he could not play those odds.*

*With great effort, and some help, Koliss and the other survivors had been able to clear away from the escape pod crash and settle into a narrow canyon entrance that was covered and could be further hidden by camouflage netting. Koliss would take a very small fraction of supplies and try to get away from the pod a few hundred meters away. He hoped to fool any pursuers about how many people had actually survived that crash, buy time for the rest to get found or at least survive.*

*There was some criticism of the plan, mainly coming from the Selenian engineer he was currently bandaging.*

*“There is no guarantee they’ll find you before they find us! You’re setting yourself up for suicide and if they do find us, you’d be the only one worth a damn in fighting!” Koliss bit back a retort that worked his way up his throat. He tried to respond evenly.*

*“There’s no guarantee no matter how you slice it. We are behind enemy lines here, and if they decide to send out a search party, then no amount of fighting if going to save us. I need to get up high, get visible, and hopefully any enemy presence will get distracted on me and forget about looking too hard around the pod.”*

*Koliss’ tone brooked little argument, and the obvious pain that Arlos was in stopped him from pressing the point further. Koliss slipped a holdout blaster into his hand as he forced Arlos to look at him.*

*“We have to try something; I can’t just sit and wait for the contact, I have to get out in front of it. If it comes down to it, you can hold your own.”*

*Koliss stowed away the few supplies he would take and spoke to Arlos as he moved away. “Remember what you represent; Arcona Invicta!” A weak chorus returned Koliss, but it was enough to satisfy him as he made his way to higher ground.*

*Koliss marched into certain capture, torture, and interrogation in the hands of one of the more vicious enemies he had been pitted against. His life as he knew it would soon be over. He never broke his stride; he had a mission to fulfill. Koliss began muttering under his breath as he moved. His throat began to dry in pain while his body protested under the strain of surviving a crash landing. He still carried on.*

*“Sworn first, to protect and serve, sworn second, to heal and give of thyself…”*