

Antiquities

Stronger Together Fiction: Macron and Thanadd

Adept Macron Goura Sadow 4856 CNS writing in red

Battlemaster Thanadd Mawgath 10503 CP writing in black

Location: planet Reliquary, Crater of Zhytra

Mission: Explore the crater and Sith site

Star Courier Panthac

Reliquary system

Planet Reliquary orbit

Macron sat deep in meditation in the hold of the transport as his droids piloted the ship. The Sith could feel the power emanating in the Force from several locations down below. Fleeting glimpses of long past shades whispered across his consciousness. Many Things had happened here so long ago. The Adept growled quietly. The faint images were vague and blurred except for the ones from the Clone Wars. He did not give a damn about anything so recent. It was the ancient events he wanted to see most.

After quite some time one very brief image flitted across his mind's eye. It was unmistakable. An amphibian-like alien with an elongated head, gray skin and eyestalks that protruded from the sides of its head. Then an exploding ship that resembled a metallic ball clutched between the focussing tines of a lightsaber. Macron's mismatched eyes opened. "Rakata..." he whispered.

The madman swiftly made his way to the bridge. "R3, do a complete scan of the southern hemisphere of this planet. Look for geologically recent cratering and faint traces of radioactive decay. Contact CNS Actual and tie in to their environmental scan database as well."

The droid chirped and bleeped in response.

"I care nothing about Separatist debris and trash," stated the Sith angrily. "I'm looking for things that are more important than that. And much, much older."

As the droid connected with the Naga Sadow holonet the chime of an incoming transmission echoed in the cockpit. "Alchemist here. Go ahead," Macron quipped as he toggled the com switches.

"Macron." The figure of Bentre Sadow flicked in miniature on the console.

“Consul Bentre Sadow,” nodded the madman respectfully. “How may I be of service to the Clan?”

“We have joined forces with Clan Plagueis to explore this planet. We are all well aware of your skill set in regards to certain types of lore. You are to pick one of the sites that is strong with the Dark Side below. Consul Arden Karn has selected one of his best to work with you.”

Macron sneered quietly. “Surely not.”

“It is a Sith whom you have worked with before. Battlemaster Thanadd Mawgath. You have your orders. Bentre Out.”

Macron rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Out of all the people in Plagueis, Thanadd was one he could understand and respect as a fellow true student of the Sith mysteries. “Battlemaster,” said the madman to himself with a tight smile. “You grow in power my friend.”

Transport Scout *Cataphract*
Aliso System
Orbiting Aliso

Thanadd Mawgath, mottled overlord of a quiet starship, furrowed his prodigious brow as he waited. His ear discs were prepared to filter any sudden blare or chime, which anticipation seemed to restrain, somehow. The silence of the lone vessel circling the northernmost pole of Aliso seemed likely to amplify any noise at all, by virtue of being broken.

Seething with irritation, the Pau’an wished the 2-1B dutifully tending the entry sites of his cybernetic limbs would say something, or disturb the unwanted peace of the *Cataphract*’s cockpit. It did not, of course, remaining the quiet but precise servant Thanadd otherwise preferred. It was not programmed to be a companion.

“*Finally*,” he growled, Thanadd’s stonelike flesh pocked with goosebumps as the purr of his own vocabulator hit the perfect subsonic growl. His strange excitement grew as the coordinates unfurled over his ship’s digital instruments, whose state-of-the-art technology now rendered the ship’s weapons mostly useless - *momentarily*. The power drain of the ship’s electronic warfare suite was worth the sacrifice, protecting the most precious data with nigh-impenetrable encryption. Even more modern and puissant vessels could rarely match the technology in sophistication, and Clan Plagueis remained weary of private owners boasting such capabilities inside their star system.

“That will be all,” Thanadd stated, raising a massive gauntlet whose fingers bent with nonchalance. The surgical droid did not contest his master’s orders, absorbing pincer like

appendages and helping itself to a dark corner of the cabin, keeping its thankless vigil. Thanadd programmed his astrogation system, hoping that his journey would not remove him far from standard hyperspace lanes, but plenty prepared to find his way if necessary.

As usual, Macron Goura knew more than expected, and also as usual was willing to share his knowledge with the Pau'an blackguard. Not unlikely allies, per se, but the ease with which the two seemed to collaborate might have been. Neither had yet decided, for sure.

"Always one step ahead, aren't you?" Thanadd asked, as if the madman could hear him. He couldn't - could he?

The question lingered, even as the *Cataphract's* hyperdrive engaged.

Planet "Reliquary"
Crater of Zhytra
Old Ruins

The two Zabrak men stood and scanned the sky with an Clone-wars era pair of battered eletrobinocs. Their ochre-colored robes whipped around them in the wind. Dry grit caked their feet and hands. Around them lay rusting debris from the Clone Wars that was slowly being swallowed by the dust in this kilometers-wide crater. Behind them yawned the entrance to a barrow-like hill. The surface of the hillock appeared to be nothing but blasted soil and clinkers but hewn stonework could be seen inside.

"Do you see that?" asked one Zabrak to the other. "There are too many stars up there. And they are moving."

"They are ships, my apprentice. Starships bearing warriors who know of the Force. I have dreamt of this." The older Zabrak folded his arms. "Perhaps they have come to learn from us, Terim. We are, after all descendants of the old Sith who came to this world to find relics of the Ancient Ones."

"Teacher Huthis, are we not descended from those whom the Sith kept in bondage so long ago?" The younger Zabrak looked perplexed. "That rose up and killed those who remained?"

"That is true. However we learned from what the Sith left behind when they fled this world during the Great Wars. Perhaps the newcomers will have ships that we can... borrow. Finally descendants of the Grotthu can escape this world and claim our rightful legacy as masters of this galaxy."

“Are they Jedi, master? Like we prepared for?” The younger Zabrak glanced towards the interior of the chamber in the pile of ruins that held combat droids salvaged from the Clone Wars wreckage. “The defense droids will need to be charged.”

“No, I don’t think so. Something much darker than Jedi. Their power feels more like our own. However the Dark Side clouds all things here as you well know. Come, we must inform the others.” Both Zabrats turned and entered the crumbling mound behind them.

Planet “Reliquary”

Landing Zone outside the Crater of Zhytra

The mad Alchemist sat astride his speeder bike as the *Cataphract* landed nearby. The Elder keyed his comlink and connected with the cockpit of his own transport *Panthac*. “HK, I want you to guard the ship. R3, continue your geochemical scans. Labor Droid, do a complete maintenance check.” The transport scout ship finished settling down and shortly thereafter a gangway dropped down. Thanadd Mawgath stepped forth.

The tall Pau’an stood impassively for a few seconds as he regarded the landscape. “This part of Reliquary is not much to look at,” he commented dryly through his vocabulator. “Greetings Adept Sadow.”

“Battlemaster Mawgath,” replied the Adept with a nod of respect for his fellow Juggernaut. The synthetic human gestured at a canyon yawning in the steep crater wall. “That which we seek is surely inside of this crater.”

“Plagueis is interested in industrial ores and technology.” Ever succinct, Thanadd peered about. “I obtained some very interesting readings from inside that crater as I was landing.” The blackguard flexed his cybernetics. “The scans were inconclusive but tantalizing. An unusual metallic ore may exist inside.”

“I suspect you might be correct. My own electronic scanning devices are adequate but I prefer hands on chemical analysis. Something in that crater is interfering with my scans as well. That piqued my interest. The Dark Side is strong within and that is what Clan Naga Sadow seeks.” The Sith Elder looked at a small datapad produced from his belt. “I can say this much, however. This is not a normal crater formed by the impact of an asteroid. There are no shatter cone structures in the rock below us according to R3’s scans. And no central crater peak formed by isostatic rebound. Rather, the rock looks to have been vaporized and melted by extreme heat.”

“I see.” Thanadd thought carefully. “More akin to the excavation resulting from a nuclear explosion. Yet I detected almost no lingering radiation counts. So, the event either happened long ago or was created by something other than nuclear weaponry.” He bent down and picked up a clinker from the dust. “This looks very much like fused glass from such an explosion.”

“Exactly. I suspect it was the Force that created this ancient blast.” Macron looked at the canyon with his mismatched eyes and then closed them. “Can you *feel* it?”

“I can, yes.” Thanadd closed his own pale eyes. “Power. Darkness. Like the very fabric of the Force is strained inside that place somehow. And... perhaps some who can touch the Force dwell within.”

“Indeed.” The Elder chuckled. “If they have something we want, we should go and take it from them don’t you think? And kill them of course. It is our right as Sith.”

If Thanadd could smile, he would have. “Agreed. Perhaps they will present a worthy challenge. Let me get my transportation.”

Planet Reliquary
Crater of Zhytra
Location One

The thrum of speeders traversing the eerie flesh of the craters might have lulled less intrepid explorers into a haze, the rocky outcroppings and dry scenery offering a parched and prosaic aesthetic. It was not what one noticed with their eyes which made this place remarkable, and the prodigious Sith devotees could feel it. The beckoning intrusion of the Dark Side pulled them *somewhere*, and neither bothered to speak the words. They were drawn to the site like two elephantine monoliths drug along via tractor beams, advancing with an ominous and determined quietude.

A temple.

Or, at least, what remained of something which must have once resembled a temple.

The prodigious slabs were stacked in the tell-tale pattern common amongst all civilizations capable of determining the best way to make rocks stay piled up for long periods of time, a pyramid like gradient created from the eroding effect of cosmic winds. The crumbling ziggurat appeared in a state of disrepair and disuse, the mouth of the ancient structure closed with a massive stone tongue. The stillness of the large, tablet like door convincingly whispered a tale of neglect...

...at first.

Like cautious pilgrims incredulous at finally reaching the Promised Land, Macron and Thanadd peered into the shadows of the pantheon before them, invisible tendrils of blight and power wringing potent mystical senses.

“We...are called to this,” announced Thanadd, confirming shared suspicion.

“I can feel it. Beckoning. Instigating. *Waiting. Expecting.*”

The Pau’an threw his cape behind his shoulders, removing any encroachment which might impede his reactions. A practiced habit. He did something like sighing, the vocabulator articulating it as the hissing of pressurized gas escaping some great, piston-controlled machine.

Was that...*life*, they felt? In this desolate place? The darkness was too overwhelming to distinguish its drifts and recessions. Here, and now, all was consumed by it. Everything was *one*.

The ancient and sinister glamor of Macron’s battlesuit rendered the mysterious temple less of an anachronism, a dignified contrast to the gesticulation of his companion’s cyborg-like limbs. He produced a small handheld device, wedged in place by a heavy gauntlet, which seemed to tell the Adept a satisfying story. He scowled as he read some unknowable report, Mawgath looking on with an obvious curiosity. He waited for the elder Sith to share his insight, not bothering to ask.

“No poison,” he stated, without relief.

“Molecular scanners find no trace of harmful particles or compounds in the surrounding atmosphere. We can be fairly certain, then, that the interior of the temple is likewise void of any prevailing airborne dangers. Most doors are not perfectly sealed, particularly not one as old as this one...”

He knelt before the face of the stone door, driving his heels into the the terrain below. His hips coiled his mighty frame into something of a spring, dense with potential energy. The ever-weary Sith was nowhere close to being out of position, even in such a pose.

“...dust floats in and is swept out. It would only take a few immeasurably small particles to register...”

Macron stood to face his companion, who watched silently. The madman had noticed the fresh dirt upon the bottom of the door, caked into the cracks and crevices from an invariably recent impact.

“...but this door has been opened - and closed again - *recently.*”

Thanadd raised his own enormous paw, focusing telekinetic strength with a claw-like gesture. The door began to groan, budging mere inches.

“Hmm. Then we should let ourselves in.”

An increased pulse. Escalating heartbeats.

“NO!” Macron bellowed, only barely too slow.

An explosion like an earthquake.

Black.

As the dust cleared the twin armored Juggernauts groaned and began to stagger to their feet. A combination of Dark Armor, skin that hardened with the Force, and instinctive use of the Barrier skill had preserved their life. Lesser men would have been blown to pieces. Even so the two Sith were stunned.

“Ballocks,” grumbled Macron as he bent over and placed his hands on his knees. “Detonite. That hurt.” The Sadow coughed under his helmet. “Crude but effective. I imagine that little trap was set for Jedi.”

Thanadd stood and braced his cybernetic arms against the wall. “Then it is good that we are not Jedi,” remarked the Pa’uan through his vocabulator. “I imagine they were not planning on armored Sith.” Clanking sounds could be heard from inside the now-open passage. “We are about to have company. I’m sure they expect disabled opponents.”

“Then that is their foolish mistake,” chuckled the Adept in reply. Both Sith raised and ignited their lightsabers in near unison as battle droids rounded a corner in the passage. Tangerine and crimson light illuminated the corridor as the first blaster bolts began to rain upon them.

“Incredible,” commented Thanadd as he deflected several bolts. “Antiques from the Clone Wars.” The Battlemaster reflected a bolt back at one of the battle droids and dropped it. “And not in great repair either. Their alloys are of no interest to me.”

“Probably... salvaged... from the scrapyards,” replied the Elder Sith as blaster bolt deflections punctuated his speech. The corridor was too tight to rush the droids and cut them to pieces. There were other options however. A thought passed between them both. It was time for aggressive applications of the Force. Time to show the clankers the power of the Dark side.

Both Sith drew upon their inner anger and released it towards their foes with a shout of aggression. Macron raised his off-hand and sizzling cables of azure electricity battered the droids and blew out their power relays. Simultaneously Thanadd Mawgath hit them with hammer blows of telekinetic power that stove in metal plates and crushed processors. The droids fell into a mess of crumpled and smoking metal with a cacophony of clanging sounds.

“Most effective.” Thanadd surveyed the wreckage with a creepy stare. He waved one of his massive cybernetic limbs and moved the droid debris to the side with the Force. “I am quite sure their masters heard that and will arrive soon.”

“I certainly hope so,” the Alchemist sneered. “Let the puling whelps come. Killing them will be satisfying.” Both Sith continued to delve into the passage. “This was but an appetizer. There is more meaningful fare to be had deeper within.”

It was not long before those who inhabited the crumbling mound showed themselves. The two Zabrats stepped forth from the shadows that led to the center of the hoary structure. “We are the Grotthu,” said the older one. “I am Master Huthis. This is my apprentice Terim. Have you come to learn?”

Macron and Thanadd regarded each other incredulously. Thanadd spoke up first. “Surely you are joking.”

“It is no joke,” spat the younger Zabrat. “You will show your respect for my Master!” Silence punctuated the room for a few seconds.

The silence was relieved by hearty laughter from both Juggernauts. “Master, ahahaha!” Macron laughed. “What a pile of pudu.”

Thanadd chimed in with his vocabulator. “You are both weak and ignorant.”

Terim charged at the two intruders as his teacher yelled at him to wait. It was a matter of mere instants before Thanadd Mawgath’s blade struck the top of the Apprentice’s head clean off. The Zabrat’s brain sizzled as it fell from the young man’s cranium when he fell to the cold stone floor twitching.

Huthis ignited a crude red lightsaber and leveled it at Macron. “You will pay for that.”

“I sincerely doubt it,” giggled the madman while igniting his own orange lightsaber as the Zabrat attacked. The Sith Elder parried the upstart’s blade, locked his own against it, and kneed the Zabrat in the crotch. The madman’s strength combined with the Force to deliver a blow that shattered Huthis’ pubic bones like an eggshell. Splinters of bone were driven deep into his bowels. Huthis hit the floor in convulsions from the pain.

“You are no Master,” spat the Alchemist at the groaning prone Zabrat. “And Grotthu means slave in old Sith, you fool. You aren’t even worthy to be a slave. Would you care to do the honors Thanadd?”

The looming Pa'uan merely reached down and coldly crushed the Zabrak's neck with a cybernetic fist. "What a shame. They retained none of the original strength of their masters." He picked up the crude lightsaber hilt and examined the metal. "However, this metal looks promisingly old. Possibly Rakata as you say."

"Indeed," said Macron with a smile as he pulled a pouch off of the side of the Grotthu leader. "And these Sith scrolls also look promising. I think we have enough to satisfy our Summits."

"Agreed. Further exploration of this structure will undoubtedly yield more results."

The two Sith turned towards the far entrance and walked calmly out, each keeping an uneasy eye on the other.