

Leeadra grimaced at the company she had for lunch. “Will you put that thing down already? I’m trying to have some fun here, and you’re over there glaring at that datapad like it beat a kitten to death with a puppy.”

Dropping the datapad onto the table, the Zeltron tossed her head back and sighed. “Just pisses me off, s’all.”

“Then why read it *again*? How many times have you looked at that thing anyway?”

“I... honestly don’t know.”

Despite all the devastation, there were a few places left in Dajorra that were relatively untouched. Not all businesses had been torched, and not all of the devastation had yet to be cleaned. The café they were in was fully functioning and mostly stocked, though there was some debate about the massive black splotch on the wall; remnants of a firebomb that had accidentally gone through the front window. They knew it was an accident because it was the owner that had thrown it.

It was supposed to be a lunch date between the former master-and-apprentice pair, but Qyreia had brought work along with her. She couldn’t seem to get away from it anymore.

“How do you look at their motivations,” she asked, tapping the device much to Leeadra’s chagrin, “and go, ‘Oh yeah, that sounds reasonable’?”

“Eat your sandwich,” the Pantoran chided.

Qyreia put her hands together as if in prayer. “Yes *mastaaah*.” She added a light bow for effect, eliciting a chuckle from the blue-hued woman.

“Been busy?” she asked, trying to bring the conversation back to something resembling normal.

“Eh. Organizing raids, coordinating logistics... it’s like trading or smuggling, but frackin’ *bigger!*” She threw out her arms to add emphasis. Clearly the report on the datapad had riled her up.

Not surprising. The Force user had stopped reading the profile documents on the Collective after her first perusal. She knew just as well though that Qyreia took things personally. It was the same thing when the Dark Council was purging the Undesirables. Albeit, at the time, she *had* been targeted directly. Now she was up against a group that hated her girlfriend for her affinity for the Force, and likewise hated her simply by association. It would make anyone angry.

Leeadra had spent enough time watching the Zeltron to know better. It wasn't just about being targeted. It was about being lumped into a group based on the crudest of criteria. It was the same fight she'd had with her own Zeltron heritage for so long.

"Also turns out the kids like to play truth-or-dare," Qyreia half-chuckled before sipping at her sugar-laden caf. It thoroughly broke Leeadra from her thoughts.

"Eh?!"

"Something something I made out with Satsi something."

"*What?!*" The Pantoran slumped back in her seat. "What about Keira?!"

"She knows it's just a game, for one. Besides, do you know how *satisfying* it was to see that schutta's face afterward? Priceless!" She paused to clarify. "Sati's face; not Keira's."

Leeadra huffed in amused indignance. "To think, a minute ago I couldn't get you to shut up about the Collective. Now you're talking about making out with women that aren't your girlfriend."

"Least mine's not twice my size and furry," she replied, hovering over her cup.

The Pantoran's face darkened in a blush, her expression one of affronted embarrassment rolled into one. Eventually she just looked away, pretending to be mad, saying, "She's not *twice* my size."

"Hm," her friend replied pensively. "Back to your bit about my coping mechanisms... Lee, this crap sucks, and everyday I lay down more fracking tired

than the day before. Honestly, I've gone through more soul-searching karkery in the last year than I think I have my entire life. Some of it I didn't even *want*."

It was hard to forget going to the Zeltron's apartment after her aneurysm and coma that had stopped any and all control of her race's preternatural abilities. Even now, she could feel a dose of the red woman's influence in the air.

"I know."

"Gotta say though, much as it pisses me off that I'm apparently always gonna be targeted by *someone*, I think I'm getting used to it. Seems to just be a *thing* in the Brotherhood."

"You're telling *me*."

"*And*, since I live in the Citadel and work on a military base in the middle of the ocean, can't say I feel especially in-danger when I'm doing my normal thing."

"Must be nice," Lee said, rolling her eyes as she sipped at her drink.

"Well quit with the criminal underworld stuff and you *might* have a few less issues." The mercenary chuckled. "How's that work with you being a former cop?"

She rubbed her temples. "So long as I don't think about it and can somehow justify it..."

"You'd fit well on the Dark Council with that kind of attitude." Qyreia lifted her sandwich in a toast before biting into it. Of all the ways she could be mentally lambasting herself over the Collective, the reigning Grandmaster's shenanigans, and all of life's other little problems, she was glad that she had friends like Leadra to share in the misery with.