

## *All Quiet on Eldar*

All things considered, the place wasn't a *total* wreck.

The damage and devastation left in the wake of the battle with the slavers was surprisingly and mercifully minimal. Compared with the task of rebuilding an entire world, the fight was a simple affair. Watching the former slaves trickling through the streets of Shihon was like seeing life walking out of the sea in real time: slow, haphazard, and comprising surprisingly small numbers.

Qyreia angled her head toward the Kaleesh standing next to her. "There's supposed to be settlers coming here?"

"Yes," replied the gravelly, metallic voice. She wasn't sure what had gotten him so banged up in her short absence, but the Zeltron knew better when it came to Rogon Skar Agrona. He had a habit of making trouble for himself, usually claiming any wounds as some sort of penance for past sins. "We still have several days, but they will be coming. Mostly from Selen. A few from the asteroid."

"Those places don't have much in the way of population either, these days."

The Kaleesh shrugged noncommittally. "They will adapt." He leapt down from their perch on the rooftop-turned-watchtower. "Or not. Then we can determine another course of action."

"Awful callous for a guy who's had so many second chances." She looked back at him over her shoulder. "Or did you forget about all that, Mister *Aedile*?"

"How can I when you're always reminding me?" He hunched his shoulders and disappeared into around the corner, the Zeltron caught in her own trap.

"Skar. Hey! Skar!" Frustrated, she slammed her fist on the sandbag wall. "Frack. Good job Q. Way to really build that team trust."

Even when she was Quaestor, her relationship with Skar had been purely professional. No beers on the weekend or spending quality time with one another. He had always seemed so distant, like he wanted space, so that's what she gave him; and every time he showed up to work with a new prosthesis because he'd closed out an old grudge, she would chastise him and return to business as usual. In retrospect, it seemed a fairly stupid way to handle her then-second-in-command. She'd worked so hard to keep a professional distance that, these days, it seemed like she didn't have much in the way of friends.

*No sense wasting time in worrying about it right now*, she thought as she took a similar path down from the lookout post into the city below. She passed by a crater that had been an entrenched gun during the battle. The pit of blackened stonework

intermixed with variously-sized pieces of rubble. By now, most of the bodies and body parts had been cleaned up.

The mercenary came across multiple such scenes as she made her way through the tight confines of the desert capital. Her battle had been far off, touching only at the fringes of the action with her newly acquired sniper rifle. Seeing everything up close forced her to imagine what it had been like — the blinding flashes of light as bombs hit their targets, the yelling above the screaming energy bolts of blaster fire, and the dust kicked up by so many feet rapidly moving from cover to cover. Here and there, she could see spots of blood that had at least partially absorbed into the stones and baked clay. But it was all so scattered. The slavers had been entrenched, but they were hardly an army capable of defending an entire city.

A person could walk the streets and never see a single sign of the battle, or they could come upon every bloody and blasted mark of it.

So it was just a little bit odd when she saw Xenna patrolling the streets, seemingly in search of something. “Pinky!”

*Goddammit, the name is spreading like an unchecked venereal disease.* “What’s up Xen?”

“Need you down at the docks.” She jabbed her thumb in the direction of the starport. “There’s some issues with the locals that aren’t exactly local.”

“The... what?”

“Aliens. Near-humans and humanoids.”

Qyreia pursed her lips thoughtfully. “But... aren’t you...?”

“...What? Am I what?”

“Umbaran?”

Xenna’s face curled in a way that the Zeltron couldn’t quite describe. Somewhere between amused and... not homicidal, but not *not*-homicidal. “No. Just really pale.”

“Oh... Okay then. I’ll uh... head down there and see what I can do.” She was about to continue on her way, but paused mid-step. “Hey, uh, how would you feel about getting a drink or something when we get back home?”

“Sure,” the human said noncommittally.

“Cool. Sounds good.” They each walked their separate ways, but the Zeltron continued to mutter to herself. “Cool. Cool. *Cool?* What am I, sixteen? Frackin’ karksticks I’m an idiot.”

With her renewed sense of social solitude, Qyreia made her way to the starport with due haste. She had heard of some minor issues in releasing them, but nothing specific to humanoids or near-humans. Although, when the two most hostile factions of the planet were racially divided, it made some sense. It also made the merc wonder what was happening in the settlements on the other side of Eldar.

There was little time to ponder too deeply. The noise of the argument reached her before the sight of the people did. She flashed her ID badge to the DDF guards on the fringes of the starport and squeezed her way through the barricades and people milling about, before finally finding a clear space right where the argument was happening.

“How we know you not slaver too?” The accent was, based on Qyreia’s limited experience, Keadean in origin, but the voice belonged to a Twi’lek; green skinned and pretty, if a little thin from minor malnutrition.

The Twi’lek’s opponent was a human; one that the Zeltron was familiar with. “Shadows, will you *listen to me?! I’m not a karkin’ slaver!* But you *need* to stay here so we can make sure you stay *safe!*”

*Oh, so that’s it*, she thought, watching the altercation with studious interest. *The folks here are worried that we’re keeping them corralled because we’re slavers too.* There was still the matter of the slavers all being from various non-human races, but that piece seemed to be largely overlooked, given that this new group of people with guns all looked to be human-ish, at the very least. Other than the striping in their skin, Selenians looked merely like pale, blond humans.

“Okay,” she muttered to herself, “happy vibes. Let’s go.” While she may not have had control of her Zeltron abilities anymore, she was still capable of conveying a soothing atmosphere between the pheromones and natural empathic telepathy. Her appearance alone seemed to put some quietude into the unruly mob. “Heya Satsi. Xenna said there was some trouble.”

The Tameike woman huffed, but she knew a precarious situation when she saw one. Besides, it wasn’t often she saw the Zeltron strutting her stuff quite so fervently. “Something like that. They think we’re slavers, just taking out the competition.”

“That so?”

“Is true.”

Qyreia settled the little anxious flutter in her chest. “What my friend here said was true: we are not slavers.” She spoke slowly so that the Twi’lek could follow along, even

with her rudimentary knowledge of Basic. “We are from the nearby planet of Selen. These soldiers,” she pointed to the DDF troops milling about, “are part of the Dajorra Defense Force.”

“They are Confederacy?”

Qyreia nodded. “Yes. The Dajorran Confederacy.”

“No,” the Twi’lek said, shaking her head. “*Keadean* Confederacy.”

“Yeah, well no one’s seen a Keadean in quite a while, so...” Somewhere deep down, the comment seemed to hit home with the Twi’lek, who rapidly translated the conversation to those hovering over her shoulders. “Listen, there’s a *lot* of things that will be happening, and it’s going to come very fast. For now, you guys should head over to the tent,” she pointed to a large, green open-faced tent with a field kitchen inside, “and grab some food. It’s not gourmet, but it’s better than whatever the slavers were feeding you.”

“Gore-may?”

“It’s not fancy,” Satsi cut in, a tinge of impatience in her voice, but the locals seemed to understand well enough, nodding silently to themselves and shuffling away. “Shadows Pinky, what was all that?”

“I dunno. They’re just stunned, I think. Don’t know what to make of the world anymore.” She looked at the human. “You wanna grab some caf?”

The look of disgust on Tameike’s face said plenty. “I don’t see any cafes, and *those* frackers in there... I don’t know if it’s the grounds or them, but it’s *bad*.”

Qyreia chuckled and rattled her pack.

“Oh?”

“Follow me.”

The starport that had been a staging ground for the slavers was now a resupply point, with all of the destroyed or disabled slaver ships hauled off the landing pads to make way for DDF and Arconan vessels. The nearest structures had been turned into something of a headquarters and refugee camp, providing ample room for both parties to rest and stretch their legs while planning the next move. *That’s the higher-ups’ problem right now*. For the moment, Qyreia was alright with some light conversation while she and Satsi made their way out of the cordoned area.

“Where are we going? Looking for someplace *private*?” Satsi’s tone was thick with innuendo, but the Zeltron just laughed it off — something that the human was still getting used to.

“Something like that. You’ll see.”

Several minutes of walking took them to a castle with walls that looked to be made out of sapphires — a trick of engineering with crystals of much lesser value, but no less impressive. Satsi marveled at the sight, having attacked the city during the night, and thus unaware of any such architecture. When they reached a courtyard partially covered in coarse, half-dead grass, she saw the Zeltron approach a lone speeder bike and toss down her gear. Looking toward the walls showed her a panorama that overlooked much of the desert city and the land beyond, as well as what appeared to be a smaller, separate spaceport.

“Fancy digs you found yourself. Laid any claims yet?”

“Much as I’d like to,” Qyreia said as she plugged a heating coil into the speeder’s power cell, “Galeres already owns this. S’called Shiro Castle, or at least that’s what the dossier I downloaded to my wrist unit says.”

“This is already Galeres’?”

“Allegedly. Seems we had quite the operation here once upon a time.” She patted a spot next to her on the floating vehicle while, on her opposite side, a small can or kettle was already steaming. “Airbrake’s on. You can lean on it and it’ll hardly budge.”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

Rather than merely lean on it, Satsi vaulted up, spinning as she sat to face out the same way as her host. The bike hardly swayed, but the Zeltron checked the caf maker all the same. Steam roiled out of the canister, prompting Qyreia to pull a silvery bag from a ration pouch her pack. She tore the bag open and poured in the dark brown grains, almost instantly imbuing the steam with its aroma.

“Be about another minute.”

“Smells better than the food tent’s, at least.”

Qyreia fiddled with the machine momentarily, glancing at Satsi from time to time. “I take it you haven’t gotten a chance to sleep yet?”

“Not a karking wink.” Satsi looked the Zeltron over. “You look like crap too.”

Her eyes rolled at the off-handed remark. “Why yes Satsi, I *am* tired. How kind of you to notice.” She chuckled. “That obvious, huh?”

“Just a little.”

Finally, the caf signalled its readiness, the can whistling high and soft until the Zeltron dialed down the heat. The cups she pulled out were standard-issue military fare, but they sufficed as containers for the hot, dark liquid. There was no cream or sugar, but the look on Satsi’s face when she inhaled the scent steaming from her cup told her that it wouldn’t be necessary. They both allowed for their servings to cool a little, silently sipping while they watched the horizon.

“Not bad for a freeze-dried ration pack.”

“Right? The secret’s in...”

“Shhshshhsh. Shh,” Satsi chided gently. “Don’t ruin the moment.”

So they sat there, each nursing their cups of bitter caffeine, quietly enjoying the scenery before their eyes as equally as they did each other’s presence. Even though the battle was over, it offered an added sort of peace, away from the dramatics and politics.

Eventually though, the caf had to run out.

All the water features had long since been shut down or dried up, so the best they could do was to use the rag from the emergency repair kit to wipe out the dampness from the cups.

“That was good, Q. Thanks. I feel a little better already.”

Her eyebrows perked momentarily before settling in. *She didn’t call me Pinky.* “I’m glad you liked it.”

“You going somewhere?” she asked, noting how neatly the Zeltron was packing everything away.

“Gonna hit up some of the villages and work out a resettlement plan. Bringing people in won’t be worth much if there’s no food or infrastructure.”

“Mind if I join? I need to get away from these...” She paused, considering her word choice, “...*people.*”

Qyreia blinked. “Wow, you really *are* trying to turn over that new leaf.”

“Oh kark you, Pinky! You want some company or not?!”

That made the Zeltron laugh. “Yes Satsi, I would love your company.”

“That’s more like it.”

The streets outside the castle walls were too narrow or choked with debris to ride out, so the pair walked the Zeltron's bike down, making roughly for one of the Galerian outposts scattered around the city where Satsi had her own bike staged. It felt very strange to even still be in the city. Every single operation with Arcona's military before now had ended in almost immediate evacuation or withdrawal, either because the Dark Council took the reins after the fighting was done, or because the Zeltron was too injured to stay in the battlezone.

Despite this relative inexperience in occupying their conquests, the DDF troops were doing a good job with what they had available. The companies of ground troops were scattered around the city at various strongpoints, while the tank companies filled the gaps with their heavier firepower. Here and there, at the highest points in the city, could be seen Galerians' artillery pieces, with a commanding presence of force for kilometers around. Clearly it wasn't the Galerians running this part of the show.

While Qyreia considered this amidst the odd banter from Satsi, they could see through the gaps in the buildings they were nearing their destination. As they approached an intersection, a familiar large reptilian humanoid turned the corner, nearly blocking the entire route.

"Oh, hey Grot! How's things going with the locals?"

The Trandoshan growled slightly, hissing menacingly before turning and continuing on his way.

"Careful *handbag*. Pinky here shoots better than you do."

He only responded with an irritated grunt, lumbering away in relative ignorance, leaving Qyreia wholly confused. "The hell was that about?"

"Oh, he's just mad. Heard he got the hots for some lady lizard that beat his ass. Probably sulking over it."

Qyreia nodded. "And the shooting part?"

"That's... a different rumor. I mean, it's *true* though, ain't it?"

"I suppose so."

The Zeltron didn't know what to make of Satsi's standoffishness about the enigmatic rumor she had referred to, given how forthcoming she usually was about everything. That she had deflected the topic at all was almost as telling as her lack of sarcasm. Was there something happening in the Summits that was being kept quiet? Such a thing would be unsurprising, but the Shadow Clan was also notoriously bad at keeping its own

secrets. If even *Satsi* was keeping quiet, then likely it was more serious than the human let on.

Rather than start a fight over it though, Qyreia decided it would be best to let sleeping dogs lie; for now at least.

Satsi's own speeder bike was hard to miss, its bright red paint job starkly contrasting the drab hues of the military personnel and the desert beyond. The human mounted her bike with mild haste while her counterpart did the same, both taking off into the dry landscape beyond, each vying for position. The Tameike woman was hardly one to follow, even if she didn't necessarily know where they were going.

Both bikes were extremely fast, and while Satsi's was the more maneuverable, that meant little on the open desert plain. Coupled with knowing exactly where they were going, Qyreia was frequently able to get ahead of the human, much to her amused chagrin.

Sand gave way to sun-scorched dirt, then back to sand, leaving an awkwardly shaped dust cloud in their wake, the two forms of detritus creating a visual dichotomy. As the pair realized that neither was able to get a true lead on the other — and that any such lead would result in a horrible spray of grit in the other's face — the human brought her bike close alongside the Zeltron's, following her movements with the practiced perception of someone used to shadowing someone else.

"Where we headed?" Satsi yelled over the sound of the wind rushing by their heads. In the distance could be seen dried out grassy plains, and the jungles of southern Tairiku, the Keadean continent of Selen.

"Village I found the other day. Ran into it on the way to the capital."

"What's so special about it?"

"Well, for one thing, it was still inhabited when I found it. They *should* be repatriating the locals by now. Figured it'd be a good thing to look into."

Satsi seemed largely uninterested in the resettlement of the locals, her attention more taken by the change in scenery. It was a long trip though — one that had taken Qyreia almost a full day to complete on her way *to* Shihon — and her interest was ill kept in the grassy expanse as it was when the road became surrounded by jungle. Hours passed by like this, until the human was very seriously considering turning around rather than face the monotony that not even light conversation could seemingly pierce. The random abandoned towns only served to pique her interest momentarily, until she found out that it was not their destination.

Every. time.



Such was her growing disinterest that she nearly missed it when Qyreia veered off to the left, down a disused dirt road overhung by dark trees. After a mildly sharp turn, she was able to rejoin the Zeltron, enveloped by the green canopy, their only indication of an exit being a rapidly expanding bead of light far ahead.

That light rapidly opened up before them and gave way to a large clearing of land: a small village with a small, fortified hilltop center, all surrounded by square upon oblong square of farmland in the form of waterlogged paddies. A handful of Keadeans were already tending to the plantlife, pulling up weeds or planting crops, while others milled around in the village. One group looked to be rebuilding a house, replacing tattered walls and doors with new ones. Qyreia watched nervously, knowing full well that the damage was at least partly her fault.

Whatever damage she had caused though, the locals didn't seem to mind. Those that had seen her up close enough to recognize her offered a wave before getting back to work. The two women were zeroed in on a different part of the village: a LAAT/i gunship parked on the road, with a handful of uniformed DDF personnel milling around one of the nearby houses.

"I think I found our headquarters."

"Seems like," Satsi returned, speeding on ahead so she could park. When she finally dismounted, it was with a great sigh of relief. "Shadows, *finally!*"

"Was nae expecting ta hear *that* voice out here." Kordath stepped out from the building, with Strong patiently standing just behind. His eyes noted the Zeltron just as she slowly brought her bike alongside Satsi's. "And Qybbles too? This is a surprise."

"Hi Kord." Qyreia approached the former Quaestor, playfully slapping the human's behind whilst in the midst of a stretch. It caught both of their attention. "I'm a bit surprised to see you down here. Zuj get tired of the honeymoon already?"

"She wanted me to help tha House, since I'm back in among tha masses again."

She nodded, chuckling at the thought. "Strong, good to see you as always."

"You as well, Miss Arronen."

"Pinky here wanted to help with resettlement or some such," Satsi intoned as she walked up, resting an arm on the Zeltorn's shoulder. "I came along to... supervise."

"Well, you'll have plenty. The lead lizard here..."

"Toranaga?" Qyreia chimed in. It was best they start getting the names in their heads while they could.

“Right. He’s nae too happy about tha colonists.”

“Khor’dahth!”

“Ah, there he is now,” the Zeltron said with a grin, amused by the Ryn’s face as much as the Keadean’s pronunciation of his name. “Best not keep him waiting.”

Kordath grumbled a string of light profanity, indecipherable to anyone but him, as he turned to face the local liege. While his clothes were somewhat cleaner, Qyreia recognized the humanoid reptile easily enough by his swagger, as well as the stylized sword on one hip and the old blaster on the other. In the skirmish she’d found her first time at the village, he was the only local to have any such weaponry on him.

Otherwise, Toranaga’s appearance was very similar to that of the other Keadeans: short snout, leathery greenish reptilian skin, and a short ridge of feathers topping his scalp that looked more like flowing blades of grass than proper feathers. A smaller, finer crop of these flanked either side of his snout, giving the illusion of a mustache. He was neither short nor tall, and lacked much of any discernible fat, though that was largely due to the food shortages and rationing. Beyond his gear, it was the way he carried himself that truly set him apart from the others; that and he was the only one among them that could speak Basic.

“This about tha colonists again, mate?”

“Yes! I..” He spotted the Zeltron and his voice caught. He hadn’t expected the lone warrior that had helped lift the slavers’ siege. “Lady Qyreia. I was not expecting you. You honor us with your return.”

She could feel Satsi’s eyes burrowing into the back of her skull, and the Ryn’s sidelong glance didn’t help. “L-lady? Please, Lord Toranaga, you can just call me Qyreia. Or Q, if that’s easier.”

The other two Arconans looked ready to break out some hidden stash of popcorn, but were disappointed when the reptilian merely nodded assent. “As you say. Please permit me nonetheless. As repayment.” With a polite nod, and somewhat embarrassed smile from the Zeltron, Toranaga seemed to relax. “We must talk about these... *colonists*, Khor’dahth.”

The Ryn looked to Qyreia for help with the name, but she just grinned. *Sorry buddy. I’m enjoying this too much.*

“What’s tha problem now?”

“The problem *remains* that they are settling on *my* lands.”

Before Kordath could answer, the Zeltron merc set a hand on his shoulder. “Wait, he said ‘are’. As in present tense. I thought they weren’t showing for a couple days yet.”

“Their shuttle left early and would nae leave. What was I supposed to do?”

“Get the *Nighthawk* to use a tractor beam maybe?!”

“Anyway, this village was on the docket, and it seemed the safest place. Look! Even got it’s own little fort.”

“I’m aware, Kord.”

“If it’s such a big deal,” Satsi said, breaking the conversation, “let ‘em fight for it. Winner keeps the land.”

There was a momentary silence before Toranaga thumbed the blade partway out of its sheath. “It will be over quickly.”

“Stop!” Qyreia yelled loudly, throwing up her hands and catching the attention of many of the other villagers. “There’s not enough people on here to be starting a goddamn *war*.” Her eyes narrowed at Satsi momentarily before returning to the Ryn and Keadean. “Listen, there is enough planet here for *everybody*. Kord, they’re gonna need to relocate.”

“But they’re already puttin’ down habs.”

“Well have them pick them back *up*.”

“And what’ll we eat? These lizards already have food.”

*Oh, that is not a goodamn colonist standing right behind me.* Qyreia and the others turned to face the human that had spoken — one of three present — standing not far away in the middle of the road. *Of course. Why would it ever be easy?*

“These *lizarrds*,” Toranaga growled with a guttural roll of his Rs, “are the rrightful rrulers of this land!”

Qyreia didn’t know what weaponry the colonists were toting, but she could see the villagers gripping their tools tightly. On the fringes of the empathic waves, she could feel Kordath’s apprehension and Strong’s... whatever the Garmis family emoted in such situations. The Chiss felt almost excited. Satsi just looked ready for a fight.

*Frack.*

The red bolt that exploded in the mud in front of her almost seemed as dream as she screamed, “Enough!!!”

It almost seemed a dream. Or a nightmare. It was hard to tell. As much as the would-be combatants flinched, ready to fight, both parties recognized that it wasn't their opponent that had shot. It was the red woman that was very blatantly wielding a blaster.

"Enough," she repeated, quieter this time; weaker almost. "You!" She pointed at the colonists with the muzzle of her gun. "You will relocate to an uninhabited village. Take your pick; there's plenty. You'll take as much pre-packed rations as you need until you can either start trading good or have your own farms up and running."

"But..."

"Schutta, do I *look* like I'm *asking*?!"

They might have thought to speak up again if not for the DDF soldiers that had walked up, taking two by the arms and prompting the third to follow them back to the colonists' camp. Once they had turned away and were well out of earshot, Qyreia finally breathed a sigh of relief, with the feeling that the others were just as relieved by the outcome. She dropped to the porch, sitting while the short adrenaline spike wore off.

"Damn Pinky," Satsi chuckled, ruffling the Zeltron's blue hair despite the hand trying to wave her away like she was a fly. "I didn't know you had that in ya."

"Yeh yeh, har har," she grumbled back, realizing just how tired she was as she put her face into her hands.

Toranaga still seemed on edge, but he sheathed his sword nonetheless. The villagers followed suit, going back to their tasks and reassuring those villagers that had heard the shot but not seen what transpired. A few were even toting bows and arquebuses. Things were clearly a little more tense than Bleu had originally let on. This was all very hard to see from between her fingers, and even more so as the fatigue rapidly weighed in and she began teetering.

Strong reached out to Kordath's shoulder to get this attention. "I believe Miss Arronen requires rest." His red eyes appraised Satsi. "Madam Tameike as well, I do believe."

"I shall prepare accommodations for Lady Qyreia," Toranaga offered dutifully. He saw the expression in Satsi's tired eyes as well, and he fought his expression. "And a room for her companion as well."

"We have already imposed upon you enough, Lord Toranaga," Strong said as he effortlessly lifted the sleepy Zeltron into his arms. "We would not dare to do so any further."

“I insist.” He bowed low, something that very clearly caught the villagers’ attention. “It would do me and my people a great honor.”

The Chiss looked at Kordath, who also looked at Satsi. She shrugged, prompting an aggravated huff from the former Consul. “I... don’t see why not?”

Strong shrugged, suppressing his discomfort in lodging two of his comrades in a strange place with people that were clearly not averse to violence. With the Zeltron still in his arms, he followed Toranaga, with Satsi following close behind with her own gear and what was likely one of the Keadean’s servants carrying the sleeping woman’s effects. As they walked up the steep incline toward the hilltop abode, Qyreia stirred in the large man’s arms.

“Y’didn’ hafta carry me.”

“You were quite asleep at the time, Miss Arronen.”

“S’mthin’ s’mthin’ Garmis family honor?”

“Something like that,” he chuckled.

With a content smile, she settled back into his grasp and fell asleep.

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They had arrived in the early afternoon, but when Qyreia awoke, it was early morning, with the sun’s orange glow a mere faint gradient on the horizon. This much she could see as she lazily half-opened an eye. The room was dark though, and the blanket surprisingly soft and warm. They called to her: *sleep more*. She was about to give in, only to realize as she shuffled deeper under the covers that there were no other covers.

She was naked.

Suppressing a yelp, she was suddenly very aware of someone laying next to her, breathing softly with a soft, almost cute nasal snore. With her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she peered out from beneath the blanket, craning her neck to find that her roommate was Satsi. A relieved sigh passed her lips, and the fuzzy image of the human trying to dress her for bed passed through her memory. Clearly she’d given up halfway.

Out of curiosity, Qyreia reached out a hand. Her fingers brushed bare skin. The human had given up halfway on both of them.

The Zeltron suppressed a chuckle, smiling as she listened to her companion’s quiet snoring. Looking around the room revealed very simple accommodations: latticed paper walls paired with woven reed floor mats. Other than their little mattress, no other

furniture was visible. A large square of what looked like folded cloth sat nearby on her side of the bed. Rolling over just enough to reach a hand out, she slid the item over, unfolding the cloth to realize that it was a robe, not too dissimilar from the ones she'd seen the villagers wearing.

Curious, the Zeltron slipped out of bed and carefully pulled the garment on, appreciating the light breathable fabric as much as that these people had the ability to make new clothes at all. Then her nose caught the slight scent of what might have been soap, however crude. *Ah, not new. Laundered.* She wrapped the belt around as best she could, fairly sure of her knot despite her depth perception being almost non-existent in the dark room. Taking quietly to her feet, she padded gently to the ajar door, sliding it open as quietly as she could manage.

Qyreia had not seen the world from this vantage on her first visit to the village. With the orange halo still somewhat dim on the horizon, it gave the entire landscape a certain dreamlike quality that, mixed with the cool morning air, was especially relaxing.

It was hard to imagine that, a day's ride away, the freed slaves — all inhabitants of Eldar — were living like refugees while she got what felt like the royal treatment. It soured her mood somewhat, interrupted by the sound of soft footfalls, a slight *click* in the step. The odd attribute was due to the toe claws of the Keadean rounding the corner. As it drew closer, she could make out Toranga in the dim light.

He lowered his head in greeting. "You are awake. Did you rest well?"

"Very well, thank you." She spied a small shadowy shape behind the reptilian: one of the servants of the house; or the only one. She bowed slightly. "Good morning."

Toranaga begrudgingly translated, and the servant seemed happy, returning the bow and responding in their language, still too quick for the Zeltron to understand or try to learn. When the lord's attention returned, he seemed to halt and stutter momentarily, turning his head away.

"Lady Qyreia. Is it not... a little cold this morning?"

"Hm? Seemed fine to..." A slight breeze caught her attention, and she realized that the robe had fallen almost completely open. With the skill only the desperate can muster, she close the garment around her and re-wrapped the belt, making sure to tie it off extra tight. It was hard to tell if it was the embarrassment or the frantic motions that was making her face so hot. "Sorry about that."

"No apology necessary." He paused, looking out at the budding dawn, his tongue flicking out very subtly to taste the air. "I told your comrades that you would be awake after the sun had risen."

“I can’t thank you enough for letting me stay in your home.”

His reptilian eyes searched hers, thoughtful. “It is beautiful, yes?” He motioned to the lightening horizon, distant hilltops and rare mountains silhouetted by the warming glow.

“Yeah. Hard to imagine the whole world just... dying.”

Toranaga chuckled, though less out of amusement and more like a parent teaching a child a lesson. “Lady Qyreia, you have seen for yourself. This world has not died.” He offered a shallow bow. “My servant shall attend to any needs you may have.”

With that, he left as quietly as he had come, his servant watchfully in tow and his words still hanging in the Zeltron’s mind. Eldar had not died. Watching the sun slowly rise, Qyreia was confident of that at least. She was unsure, however, of what it would become when the wounds healed.