

CHAPTER ONE: of the Bounty

Sera had never seen anything like it; not on Iridonia, not on Selen, not anywhere. The city stretched on forever; across the horizon, across the continent, across the entirety of the planet, the lights marched on and on. She had heard tale of Coruscant, of course, seen it in holo-net videos and picturesque advertisements. But all of that seemed to shrink in the face of the real thing, burning away in the ruddy orange glow of an immortal, endless ecumenopolis, shining out at her through her small vessel's viewport.

The view from the ground had immediately sullied that first, idealistic perception, of course. Sera had never been around so many people in her entire life; a seething, stinking horde, filled with shoving shoulders and pinching fingers. On Iridonia, there could be months where the only faces you saw belonged to your tribe or your hunting party. A few dozen people, maybe, a little over two hundred at most. Here, upon stepping out into city sector H-44, she was almost instantly dunked into a throng of alien life that numbered in the thousands, or tens of thousands. If she'd been smarter, perhaps, she would have rolled with it, swallowed her pride, and utilized her compact figure to melt through the crowd. But, Sera could never be called that wise. Upon first being shoved, she shoved back. That went about as well as one would expect.

A few hours later, Sera and her bruised ego finally managed to find their way to the lodging that had been picked out for her, the temporary room and board sourced and paid for, courtesy of Arcona. The hotel...hostel...motel...whatever it was, seemed utterly shady, at least slightly filthy, and most likely didn't possess whatever licenses were prerequisite to be operating on Coruscant. She was pretty sure that she heard insect life chirping within the cheap aluminum panelling of the walls. Still, Sera didn't mind at all, really. The Clan had chosen this place for a reason. If the bed was soft, the door could lock, and there was at least a relatively secure source of alcohol nearby, she was perfectly happy. Her room, as dark, cramped, and insect-infested as it was, would serve for the short time that she was here. And besides, it had one great boon going for it. Otherwise, Sera was pretty sure that Arcona would have just deposited her in some diplomatic penthouse ad called it a day, considering their lavish nature.

Haphazardly depositing her satchel down onto the mattress, Sera paused, bending to retrieve her macrobinoculars from the mess. That done, she turned and stalked across her room, snatching a cheap, canned beer as she went by the grubby little fridge. Cracking the can open, she peered through her macros, gazing out her new abode's singular, grimy window. Her target's primary residence lay in the skyscraper directly across the skylane from her room. Its location was all the intel that her Clan had been able to scrape up for her, besides the description of her target and an explanation of why they needed him. Things were still in discord after the war, and even as Arcona had come out stronger, it had also come out confused, much like the Brotherhood itself. It was probably why they had sent a total newbie after such a high-priority target.

Sera's bright-blue eyes squinted, scanning carefully through the macro's lenses. Manu Maurfai may have been smart enough — or paranoid enough — to cut off any central sightlines through his residence, but she still found him; the wiggling paunch was a dead giveaway. The Twi'lek seemed to have just arrived home, though from where exactly, she wasn't sure. All she knew was that he didn't spend very long outside, and that his guard-staff seemed wary, and very heavily armed. Oh well.

As she sipped at her lukewarm alcohol, Sera's plan started to wind in her head. She may have been a noob in the grand scheme of things, sure. But, she was also a Knight, newly appointed and anointed, for a reason. She was determined, driven, and more than that, she was a huntress; a Zabraki *ankara*, born, bred, and raised.

Manu Maurfai just happened to be her prey, this time around, and once she was on the scent of game, she never gave the trail away. She would watch for today, track his movement, try and figure out a pattern. Tomorrow evening, after a more thorough examination of his building, and any possible ways inside... she would make her move.

But, little did she know, she was not the only set of eyes watching. There was another hunter, another *ankar*, out in the muddle of Coruscant. Clad in shining armor, armed to the teeth, ready to kill. And just like her, they were planning, plotting. Manu Maurfai had many enemies, it turned out.

To sum it up shortly; he was well and truly screwed.

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“What de hell do yeh think yer doin' miss?!? That there ain't no landin' zone!”

Sera paid the Sullustan no mind, concentrated as she was on her potentially-lethal hijinks. The poor alien was just nervous; he'd been hired out to be a cabbie, not to oversee dangerous, very-likely illegal high-rise escapades. Certainly not in the middle of the night, as it was.

At the moment, Sera was engaging in a little bit of... say, creative infiltration. Assaulting Manu's property head-on would have been a death sentence; luckily, through her surveillance, followed by a little bit of close-up investigation afterwards, she had found what seemed to be an alternate way in. The ventilation shaft was just large enough to fit her. All it would take was a little bit of navigation, and a smidge of luck, and she could find her way in, grab her target from his bed, and find her way out. Somehow. Other than that, the main problem with her choice of entryway was that it was suspended some two hundred feet above the nearest ground layer, jutting only inches from the building into which it extended. If Sera wasn't as brave — or as dumb — as she was, she would have been shaking her horns off.

“Don't worry about it, man! This is what those extra creds were for. Besides, isn't this fun?”

"I dunneh wha' kindeh' fun you been haven', this biz' is makin' me sweat!"

"Well, don't worry about me," Sera reassured, smiling back at the cabbie as she finally pried the grate open with her dagger. "I'll be juuuust fine. Now, uh... go get a drink or something. And don't tell anyone I'm here or I'll...uh. Curse you. With the Force. Yeah." The Zabrak wriggled her fingers mysteriously, spurring a blank expression from her little driver. Grimacing, Sera reached up to pull herself through the tight opening, fitting with a tiny bit of room to spare. It... wasn't comfortable. Not in the slightest.

"Alrigh', alrigh'. Don't get yeh panties in a bunch, imma movin'." Grumbling, the little Sullustan pulled away, leaving Sera tucked in her cramped, sky-high perch. With a grumble, the Zabrak started to wriggle forward, quietly. Quietly.

Of course, Sera's version of 'quietly' involved a great deal of knee-scraping, head-banging, and sulfurous cursing. The system went twisting and turning on for what seemed like miles, appearing to grow smaller and smaller, until her arms were pinned to her sides and she could barely wriggle forward. At one point, Sera felt fresh air stirring on her face. Before her, the vent opened downward into a black, gaping chasm. She couldn't see the end; not even close. She didn't want to think of how long it would take her to hit bottom, hands trapped, falling *face first* down there. The image of squished Zabrak, a-la-vent, was a lovely one to keep in mind as she slowly squirmed backwards, finding her way down another path. Finally, after what seemed like eons trapped in the dark, Sera pulled herself from a floor-level grate, gasping as she emerged into the light. She had just started to truly regret her decision when she'd seen the shine ahead of her; even if by some disaster she'd come out on the wrong floor, she was just overjoyed to be out.

The vids made that seem like a much, much cooler idea. Ancestors...

She pulled herself to a standing position, slowly unrolling the knotted chords of musculature within her back; even for her diminutive frame, the vents had been a rather uncomfortable fit. Then, unholstering her blaster and saber, she turned her eyes to the environment around her, confirming that she'd come out on the right level. It seemed that she'd emerged into some kind of rear entry hall; two, sealed elevator doors flanked either side of the floor-level ventilation shaft from which she'd crawled, seemingly locked.

The opposite wall was mostly window; blasterproof, upon closer inspection. Manu was a superstitious bastard, apparently. Good for him. Sighing, Sera glanced to both sides, warm light spilling out from the chambers at either end of the hall. As the hallway ran to the right, she could hear voices, softly echoing outwards. Guards, probably... so, left it was. Tensing her mind and body, the Zabrak concentrated, focusing the Force into a transparent cloak around her. That done, the Zabrak scampered off, making for the opposite end of the complex, where she assumed Manu's quarters would lie. She failed to notice the figure, standing atop one of the

lower rooftops just outside, their armor glinting in the neon glow of Coruscant's night. Slowly, they reached to their side, withdrawing a gently beeping Denton thermal detonator. The windows might have been blaster-proof — that much they could tell without needing an up-close examination, as Sera had — but that seldom meant that they were also *blast* proof.

CHAPTER TWO: of the Hunt

“Did you see that kitchen modeling show, on Channel X-32? Man, those countertops are driving me wild.”

“I dunno what you're talking about. The counters don't mean kark when they don't match with the cabinetry, and so far, all they've been using is that crappy dark wroshir-...’

“Is this what torture feels like?” Sera whispered to herself, pressed tightly against one of the apartment's snowy marble walls, her hearts pounding within her chest. Two guards stood directly around the corner from her, barely even feet away. Even cloaked, as she was, there was no way to slip past; they blocked the entirety of the hall. They'd seemed to be glued to that position for the last hour, endlessly droning on about the Collective's new model of speeder, personal blaster specs, and home renovations.

The former two topics, at least, had been enough to keep her interested. When they turned to the latter however — and they'd been stuck on it for several minutes — it took her a great deal of self-control to keep from leaping out around the corner and cutting them both down. To make matters worse, the residential chambers lay just beyond where they had paused. There, she would find Manu, hopefully sleeping peacefully in all his greaseball glory. The only things that stood in her way were these bumbling idiots, and their ancestors-blasted cabinetry.

That situation wouldn't hold forever, however. She sensed the explosion before it came, rocking the building, the sound of powdering hyperglass and buckling durasteel ripping through the air. The shockwave nearly swept her from her feet; by the sounds of clattering from around the corner, it had knocked the guards over entirely. Almost immediately, alarms began to blare, fire-suppression systems activating with a stinging rain of freezing water and flame-retardants.

As one, the three of them cursed, and scrambled to get around the corner in unison. That caught her, unfortunately, by surprise. Unable to maneuver around them, Sera smacked face-first into the lead man. They both stumbled backwards, Sera's cloak flickering into nothing as she fell back hard on her rear. Her blue eyes trailed up to meet their slack-jawed faces as their hands crept towards their blasters. She couldn't suppress the nervous laugh that followed.

“So....uh... damn contractors, right? Can't even fix a stovetop without blowing up the whole building. Hah...yeah.”

Their hands jumped to their blasters, but she didn't need to go quite that far; thrusting her hand forward, she shoved hard with her mind, shunting the two armored men across the room, and out through the shattered glass of the window. She didn't stop to watch their downward progress. As the high-pitched screech of blasterfire began to echo from the direction of the explosion, she broke into a sprint, high-tailing it into the complex's residential quarters. Stealth, she surmised, was not much of an option anymore. All hell breaking loose usually saw to that.

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Manu Maurfai had been in the midst of a totally realistic, slightly self aggrandizing dream involving a much more muscular version of himself, the defeat of a Jedi grandmaster, and Captain Crimson clad in a set of *entirely* off-regulation armor when an explosion cut through the veil of his sleep. In a blind, waking panic, Manu scuttled out from his sheets with a squeal, falling face-first onto the bedroom floor. His chubby fingers clutched for the small arsenal of blasters stored under his mattress. He'd had the cache hidden just in case anyone ever had the nerve to attack him at his most vulnerable. His superiors had snickered behind their backs; but who was laughing now?

Who could it be? Rivals, looking for a cut of his influence? Filthy Force-users, come to squeeze him for information on their precious Deputy Master? Bounty hunters? He did owe a few credits to one of those oozing slugs on Nal Hutta. Just a few. A million credits here, a million credits there, it mattered little. What mattered most right now was saving his own skin; figuring out who exactly needed to be murdered in punishment for having the gall to attack him could be accomplished at a later date.

"Guards!? Guards, if you're not here in an instant, I'll have your pay docked, and your damn *clavicles* cut from your flimsy shoulders, do you hear me?" Manu wasn't sure where the idea of clavicle extraction had come from, but the scrambling noise that this produced as his personal guard rushed through the door was more than satisfying. Hmmping, the bulbous Twi'lek stood back from his bed, pointing the nearest of the Collective goons towards it. His arms were...not quite long or slender enough to reach the weapons case hidden underneath. "The DC-17, if you will. Make it snappy!"

"Sir, we're being slaughtered! Whatever's over there, our men aren't—"

"I didn't ask for commentary, captain. Remember your clavicles." The sound of fighting, of high-pitched shrieks of pain and blasterfire, was beginning to grow closer. Sweat standing on his brow, Manu turned from his guard, and began waddling out the door, miniature blaster clutched tightly in his thick fingers, two ambitious, brown-nosing personnel draping a fluffy bathrobe over his shoulders as he stepped out into the hall. Most of the action seemed to be centered within the left corridor; so, right it would have to be, towards the landing pad, and his shuttle. It wasn't exactly the contingency that he preferred, but Manu would take what he could

get. "Captain, take your men and slaughter whomever has broken into my lodging. Ryker, Carletic, you stay with me, please."

The Captain gave him an inordinately nervous look, that of a man being sent to his death. If he survived, Manu would need to address that; he couldn't let his guards get any ideas about cowardice, could he? No sir, they had to be better than that; but for now, he was fine sending the man off. They'd likely be cut down, just like the rest of his guard seemed to have been. No matter, the Collective would bring him whatever new toys he needed. With that, the majority of Manu's guard broke off, doubling back towards the battle. He wouldn't need them, after all. The fighting was concentrated behind him, as whatever bunch of assassins had been sent after him cut towards his chambers. Little did they know, he was already well underway into his masterful escape!

Grinning inwardly, Manu turned the corner quickly, and ran face first into a sprinting Zabrak. He went sprawling backward, rolling onto his back with a heavy flump of soft-tissue, his breath knocked out. She, on the other hand, simply staggered backwards, indignation flashing in her eyes.

"*Katkarin*, again? Can't you idiots turn *wide* around a corner for once?" She paused, however, upon seeing Manu, her eyes widening. "Oh, well that's lucky. Hiya! If you don't mind, it would be a lot easier if you just came with—"

"GET HER, YOU IDIOTS!" the Twi'lek screamed, scrambling to his feet. The Zabrak just rolled her eyes, and in a blur, whipped a long, two-bladed weapon from her back. Manu's first guard went down a half-second later, a third of his throat cleanly cut out by a swipe of the weapon. He didn't stay to watch the other guard go down. Instead, the wise man that we was, he turned and tucked tail, booking it for the landing pad.

It was amazing how fast a fat man could run when under duress, but Manu's plump, meaty legs could only carry him so quickly. It didn't take long for the Zabrak to outrun him, a sudden, white-hot pain exploding in his left leg as a thrown blade sank into it. Manu hit the ground like a sack of wet bricks, rolling for a few feet before stopping; but, he wasn't out yet. Snapping around, the Twi'lek gave a cry of pain and anger, snapping off a flurry of blaster shots at the Zabrak.

She barely caught them with the blade of a lightsaber, springing to life in her hand. Manu snarled at the sight; of course it was one of *them*. Her armor, a flexible combat suit, marked her as an assassin; a Jedi assassin, after his life? Well, call it delusions of grandeur, but he couldn't help but feel the slightest bit good about that.

He just couldn't get a shot through, unfortunately. Charging forward, she kicked the Twi'lek sharply in the wrist, the blaster skittering from his grip as the bones there cracked, eliciting a caterwaul of pain.

"I did say that this would be easier if you just came with me. Ancestors, learn to listen, yeah?"

Manu snivelled, sobbing on the outside. On the inside, however, he plotted. He planned. This impudence, this *chicannery* would not go unpunished; no, no it certainly would not. This whelp was going to suffer and he was going to enjoy it.

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Sera had to quite literally yank the quivering, gibbering Twi'lek up by his lekku to get him on his feet, tossing him into the back of his own personal speeder. Tali would have had her hide for it, but Sera didn't have many other options. It was convenient that he'd come all the way out to the landing pad on his own; she doubted that she would have had the strength to drag the ball of lard all the way here without breaking her own back.

The sounds of shooting had gone quiet within Manu's residence, a steady plume of smoke rising from the cratered building as the furnishings inside caught fire, the Twi'lek's finery going up in smoke as the two of them watched. Whatever fighting had gone down in there was over now. Either the other infiltrator, whoever they might be, had carved their way through the Collective personnel, or the incursion had been dealt with by the guard staff, who would now be looking for Manu.

Either way... now was a good time to get going. Thankfully, the Force was on her side, tonight; the speeder's keys fell out onto the carpet as she opened the front glovebox, the high-grade engine purring to life at the touch of a button. Now *this* would be a getaway, in true style, too.

As Sera began to pull off in the speeder, her inexperience behind the wheel readily apparent, she noticed a figure stepping out from the ruined, burning apartment, smoke billowing around them. They were clad in dark, shining armor. The suit was finely made, smooth and contoured. But, it was the helmet that struck Sera to the core; even she, for all of her tribal-bumpkin lack of knowledge, knew what that helm meant.

Slowly, casually, the figure raised one hand out before them, aiming. Sera gunned the engine just a moment too late; with a flash of sparks, a small, guided rocket shot out from the Mandalorian's wrist, arcing after the speeder. A better pilot might have been able to avoid it... but Sera? Nope. The thing collided with their rear engine, exploding in a miniature blast of fire and smoke.

And just like that, the speeder was going down, down, down, falling like a steel coffin towards Coruscant's floor.

Chapter 3: of the Mandalorian

Sera wasn't quite sure how long it had been when she regained consciousness. It was difficult to gauge that sort of thing, in her state, dazed, bruised, and at least slightly frustrated. Had she been a split second faster, she would have gotten away. Now, Manu was nowhere to be found, her head felt not dissimilar to how it had directly after Zuj and Kordath's bachelor party, and a bloody Mandalorian was coming after her target, and by extension, her. So, all in all, things were not in a great spot. Not at all.

Sera clambered from the wreckage of her stolen speeder, using the Force to numb the pain shooting through her body as she stepped down. The Twi'lek couldn't have gotten far; he wasn't in the best of shape in the first place, better suited to rolling than running. With one of her throwing knives stuck in his blubber and his wrist broken as badly as she suspected, there was no way that he could move very fast. It was just a matter of tracking him... and that was *certainly* something that Sera could manage. It would be just like hunting a fat loper, really; if lopers smelled, cried, and haunted grimy city streets, instead of sand dunes, that was.

She picked up his trail from a spot of blue blood, fresh. She recognized the color easily enough, from her experience with her own master. Probably not what Tali had meant to teach her, but oh well. Even with the press of Coruscant's crowds, Sera doubted that there were very many bleeding Twi'leks running around; this had to be him. She took off, following the sparsely spaced spots of blood closely, taking special pains to wipe the trail out as she went over it. The Mandalorian had to be coming down on their crash sight, soon, and if there was one thing she knew, it was that she didn't want them following after her. Not until she was ready for a real fight, at least.

Manu was wily; he switched over several roundabouts, and doubled back on his own trail several times, obviously trying to throw anyone who might be tracking him off, but Sera was a veteran at this game. Or, at least one aspect of it; she couldn't think like Manu could. More so than she, he was a real predator, a killer. She should have been more careful. Her prey's trail, suddenly and inexplicably, veered to the side, down into a dim, abandoned maintenance corridor. Sera could only think of how much a relief it was to be out of the crowds. The hallway was totally empty, turning off from the main avenue and emptying out into a back promontory, bordering the drop-off point for their level. That meant a spectacular view; just beyond the promontory's edge, sheathed by a kaleidoscopic advertisement for a lower-level nightclub, everything dropped away. The open air stretched for several hundred feet before the next level of city blocks rose, glowing softly below Sera's feet.

The view left Sera distracted. Advancing forward, she didn't see the small pool of blood where her prey had paused, didn't see them gather around the corner. She strolled right into his trap.

For the third time that night, Sera turned a corner and was instantly slammed backwards, Manu's full weight shoving her towards the void. Her blaster skittered out of her hand, a bolt firing off into the night as they scuffled. She only barely caught herself from falling right over the

ledge, grabbing hold of the Twi'lek's bathrobe to keep herself from slipping backwards. Her feet caught just enough purchase to win the shoving match that followed, the Zabrak taking the Twi'lek by the throat and throwing him backwards, away from the edge. He stumbled, his gimp leg crumbling beneath him. Her teeth bared, Sera advanced, anger and frustration building a fire in her hearts... until he started weeping, sobs wracking through his body.

"Please... gods... mercy. P-please... d-d-don't kill me... I b-beg..."

The Zabrak grimaced, her internal fires quenched in an instant. Quietly, she knelt down by the crying Twi'lek, falling for his ploy in an instant. She didn't notice the throwing knife clutched in his hand as she slowly reached out. "Hey, I'm not gonna kill you, alright? My bosses are kind, they'll just wanna talk a little bit, and—"

"BLEED, SCUM!" Manu screamed, slashing across Sera's face with the dagger. Stunned, she fell backwards, warm blood streaming down her face. The Twi'lek took advantage of her disbelief, springing quickly to his feet and making another run for it, laughing all the while. He'd done it! He'd fooled her, tricked her, proven the stupid little weakling wrong! Now, he would get away... and oh, he would find her again, he would find her, take *her* damned clavicles out, make her *pay*...

Manu turned the corner, and was immediately struck in the face by a dark, gauntleted fist. Hard. His nose popping into a mess of blue blood, the Twi'lek stumbled backwards, dazed, before collapsing into a heap, unconscious. Sera watched, dumbfounded, as a hulking, armored form stepped out over him.

The Mandalorian turned to watch as Sera climbed to her feet, helm tilting curiously. Their armor was plastered with blood and emblazoned with dozens of scorch-marks, trophies from the fight with the Collective guards, but the plate was unmistakable. Real beskar? No matter. Not much Sera could do about it; instead of focusing on that, she bent her mind towards closing the wound on her face, and formulating a plan.

"You track this trash all the way here, kid?" Sera nodded, spurring a vaguely impressed snort from the bounty hunter. "Well, damn. I assumed you bolted after I wasted your speeder."

"Not my speeder. His. *Way* too expensive," Sera explained, taking a small step closer. If she could just buy some time... "How did you find us? I covered my tracks."

"You did. I just heard the blaster fire," the hunter stated simply, motioning to where Sera's blaster had fallen in the scramble with Manu. The sound of disgust that spurred from the Zabrak brought a low chuckle from the Mandalorian. "I see he gotcha, there. He may look like a karkin' lump, but he's a dangerous snake, this one. Lucky he didn't kill ya, kid."

“My name isn’t *kid*,” Sera responded indignantly, inching another step forward. The bounty hunter seemed to be studying the still Twi’lek, nudging his pudgy form with the tip of his boot. If she could just get a little bit closer...

“Sure thing, kid,” the hunter responded, delivering the Twi’lek a firm kick in the ribs. The alien hardly roused at all. Sighing, they looked up, fixing their helmeted gaze on Sera once more. “Why the hell were you after this guy? I know he ain’t popular, but he’s a little outta your league,” they asked flatly. She saw them glance to her hip, spotting the lightsaber hanging there. That spurred another grunt of surprise. “At least I *think* he’s outta your league.”

Sera snorted, inching another step closer. “He’s not. My...*employers* think he might know where... a friend of ours has been taken. His organization has been... well, kinda annoying, ya’know? We thought they could stand to be knocked around a little bit.”

“I see. Well, they’ve certainly gotten that, at least. I hope you don’t mind if I just take this hot-mess outta your hands, kid. Nothing personal.”

Sera’s brow furrowed. “Oh, I do, actually. Listen up, bucket-brain, I just busted my butt through this psycho’s penthouse, and halfway across this damned city to get here. All you did was...”

“Kill every single one of his guards? Blow up half his building? Keep him from getting away, after *you* slipped up? You really want me to teach you this lesson, kid?”

“Yeah. That.” Sera ground her teeth, and took another step closer. “I’m not leaving without him.”

The bounty hunter just looked at her, then slowly shook their head. “If you say so, kid. I’ll try and leave you in one piece, but no prom—”

Sera struck before the hunter finished speaking, lunging forward, directly past the Mandalorian’s guard. Their blaster flew into their hand, but she reached it before they could squeeze off a shot, grabbing the weapon with her left hand as she simultaneously struck the unarmed hollow of their elbow. The pistol skittered from their grip, bouncing out over the ledge, and dropping towards the level below.

It was a pretty good start, Sera thought. Then, the bounty hunter drove an armored fist directly into her gut, crushing the air from her lungs. There wasn’t much time for thinking, after that.

Up close and personal was Sera’s wheelhouse. Both of them recognized that. As the Mandalorian retreated towards the edge, slashing with a long blade that extended from his left vambrace, the zabrak pressed forward, her saber flying into her hand. Sera’s attacks were coming too rapidly for her opponent to follow with the unwieldy blade; a feint drew their guard outward, and Sera immediately pressed her advantage with three rapid blows, the last of them a

crushing cut into the Bounty Hunter's side. Normally, the strike would have bisected the Hunter at their hip, but with the armor they were wearing...

The first two strikes glanced uselessly off in a shower of golden sparks, confirming that the plate was authentic beskar; a real ballache for her, and a boon for them. The last blow, however, cut through the plate, burning into the flesh underneath, eliciting a sharp bellow of pain.

Her advantage didn't last. Even as she knocked the Mandalorian onto his back, he kicked up, pushing her away. Then, with a tap on their wrist, the Hunter's modular jetpack roared to life, launching them out over the ledge while the backblast caught Sera directly in the chest, throwing her backwards into the promontory's rear, duraconcrete wall. Once again, the air was forced from her chest, leaving the Zabrak gasping, doubled over on the floor. Pulling in her concentration once again, she began focusing her energy, beginning to mold the Force into a shield. She was sure she would need it, soon enough.

Beyond the ledge, silhouetted through the prismatic sheen of the holo-ad, the Mandalorian hovered, their path slightly unsteady. There was no banter, no games now; both of them were all in. Drawing a new blaster from their hip, the bounty hunter let loose a stream of yellow bolts, splattering harmlessly against Sera's barrier. She had protection, for just a moment; if she could just reach the other blasters...

The bounty hunter raised their wrist once again, tracking Sera directly. She didn't know if her barrier could defend against that, but there was no use waiting to find out. Spitting out a string of sulfurous oaths, the Zabrak dove, tucking into a ball as an explosion ripped through the promontory. Sera rolled about a dozen feet before stopping, the sting of shrapnel that had pierced through her combat suit at least letting her know that all of her limbs were in one piece. Only for now, though. The Mandalorian had already sent another volley of blasterfire, which Sera barely deflected on the blade of her saber. Reaching out with the Force, she yanked the nearest of the two discarded blaster-pistols — her own LPA NN-14 — into her grip, catching the weapon deftly. Never before had she been so glad to have a hair-trigger then she was now, returning her own storm of crimson fire.

They struck each other simultaneously, the Mandalorian's shot streaking past Sera's guard, glancing against her side, armor and flesh sizzling at the sudden heat. The Zabrak flinched, dropping to one knee; but, her own work had already been done. A shot from her blaster had collided directly with the Mandalorian's jetpack, shorting one of liquid-fuel control lines. There was a cough of smoke, a burst of flame, and then they spiralled out of control, whipping towards the promontory at breakneck speed. The Hunter barely managed to disengage the straps holding them in at the last second, crashing hard into the ground with a deafening metallic clatter.

Both of them sat, dazed, staring at each other in silence for a few moments. Then, the still sparking, still out of control jetpack fell between them, and exploded.

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Sera stood, the cut across her face reopened and bleeding once more, drawing the zhaboka from her back. The Mandalorian was watching her, from across the impact crater, two blades drawn; the same, bladed gauntlet from before, and a short, curved sword, held in one hand.

“Well... we’ve made a damn mess, kid.”

“Yeah... yeah,” the Zabrak sputtered, drawing her own strength back in, the pain of her wounds beginning to fade. Suddenly, a funny thought crossed her mind. She couldn’t suppress the laughter. “Karking... contractors are gonna be *pissed*.”

“What... what are you talkin’ about?”

“Nothing. Just... concussed. Probably.” Sera shifted the zhaboka into one hand, adjusting the saber where it hung from her belt. The blade would never get through that armor; only the saber could finish this fight. Internally, the Zabrak once again began to redirect her focus; all of the effort that she had been putting into dulling her pain now went directly to her musculature, the Force filling her, strengthening her. Manu shifted, somewhere behind her, groaning. The sound elicited a small eye roll. “We should probably finish this...before he waddles off again.”

“Right,” the Mandalorian responded, rolling their shoulders, before dropping into guard. “Let’s go.” Sera nodded, lowered her zhaboka, and advanced.

It ended in five blows. A whirlwind. The Mandalorian attacked from both sides at once, striking simultaneously with their gauntlet and beskad, but Sera knew her zhaboka well; an upward sweep of the staff cracked both strikes away, opening her up to step into the Mandalorian’s guard. She didn’t try to stab through her target, however; instead, she *shoved* forward, catching the bounty hunter in their unarmored throat with the blunt center of the staff, crushing out her breath, and forcing her to one knee. Sera drew her saber, the golden blade flashing to life, and levelled it at the Mandalorian’s faceplate. Ready to strike. There was a pause, punctuated by a clatter as the bounty hunter dropped their weapons. Then, slowly, they reached up, and removed their helm.

The Mandalorian looked up, her bright green eyes meeting Sera’s. A wry smirk spread across her face. “You... you take him, Huntress. I think... you’ve earned this one.”

Sera nodded in response, a toothy grin of her own appearing. “Well... thanks, I guess. For the lesson.” Instead of turning and leaving, Sera offered the bounty hunter her hand. After a moment of waiting, she took it, rising to her feet. “C’mon. I can’t carry this lardball on my own.

Let's get him on my ship...and then we can go get a few drinks, and see what happens from there."

"Well... that sounds like a perfect end to a good hunt."