

Pack Hunter.

Nesolat platform

Arx system

38 ABY

Tahiri had just gotten a few more injured academy instructors back to the docking bay and onto transports, with the help of her Varactyl, Keraathol. The hybrid creature carried those who were too injured to run on their own. Her ride may not have been the smoothest, but it did the job quickly. Tahiri left Kera on the docking bay floor and headed back to lift to rejoin Liandry and Kz'set, the Plagueians she had teamed up with to rescue anyone and secure the platform before the administrative side would take its leave back to the surface of Arx.

The Battlelord wanted to take Kera further with her; however, the Varactyl would have barely been able to fit in the turbolifts. So Tahiri had decided to make Kera a carrier to transport wounded to the transports. Which of course meant she had to split from her group to do so. With the newest addition of the so-called Hive mind soldiers to the ranks of the Collective, Tahiri knew that the fight ahead was going to be brutal. The Shakari huntresses had been a handful enough; now, according to the Inquistorious, these Marines were even worse.

As she got into the turbo lift, and mentally told Kera to stay nearby in case more administrative people needed help, Tahiri's wrist comm dinged.

"This is Beast Leader Tahiri. This better be good."

Using her call sign only would have sufficed, but she always added her first name unless it was an undercover mission, and this was not an undercover mission. Tahiri was going to leave her mark on this station and the Collective forces within.

A terrified voice came through her wrist comm, along with screams and cries of pain.

"Please help us. We're on the third level, fifth classroom. We're being hunted by..."

The transmission was interrupted by a scream and gurgling sound, then was cut off. Tahiri stared at her comm, then swiftly punched the button for that floor. She had no true emotional ties to this place, other than fond memories of looking through the hundreds of books, studying datacron, and researching everything her little heart desired to know. She could care less what happened to the station; however, anything to do with the Collective was personal to her.

Hadzuska let out a growl next to her as the lift ascended towards the third level. If it had been anyone else, the Vornskr would have scared them to death. In fact, they probably would have been dead. However, Tahiri only smiled and patted his head, nodding as she watched the beast ready himself for the fight he sensed coming, as she did herself. The muscles beneath the

Vornskr's skin tightened and trembled, and his eyes flickered from her to the lift doors. Tahiri and Zuska were one in that moment as the doors to the lift opened, but neither leapt full force out. Instead, each took measured steps, both scanning ahead and then to either side of the doors out of the lift. Neither of them would be taken by surprise, as they worked in unison, ready to alert the other for danger. Both heard the scream from the right that would have chilled a normal person to bone; however, they, as hunters, relished the sound.

Tahiri had her saber out, unignited, in her right hand and her blacked-out Vibrosword in her left. Picking up the pace she and Zuska, jogged toward where the screams had come from. Coming to a corner, Zuska sniffed the air carefully and then hunched down, not a sound coming from him. That told Tahiri that there were enemies, just not how many. Keeping herself flat against the wall, she peeked around the corner, and quickly ducked back.

Kark it. If those people are who I think they are, I probably should have radioed for backup.

Tahiri calmed her turbulent and frantic thoughts, knowing that she needed to focus and stay perfectly alert and in sync with Zuska. Or else this may very well be one or both of their final battles.

Steeling herself for the fight, while Zuska stood and leaned against her, Tahiri immersed her senses in the Force. The Togruta reached out to see how many of these Hive Mind Marines she was up against. She sensed four minds working in sync, almost completely as one, only about six meters down the hall. Tahiri pulled her mind back and focused on conjuring a small illusion of herself. Her plan was to distract them just enough for her to gain the upper hand. Looking at Zuska, she nodded as her double raced ahead of them and 'attacked' the soldiers.

Let's see how smart these guys are.

As the Hive Mind Marines began firing and trying to kill the Togruta that was suddenly in their midst, Tahiri augmented her muscles with the Force for speed. With one last deep breath, she turned the corner and ran straight for the closest Hive mind soldier.

Somehow, the soldier, whether he sensed her coming or got wise to the illusion that they could not kill, spun around and fired his MM9 wrist rocket at her. Tahiri saw it and ducked just as it whizzed by her head, the rocket exploding on impact in the corridor behind her. She could feel the heat on her back as she engaged the soldier.

Zuska leapt at the Marine, his jaws clamping down on the hand that had almost injured his pack leader. No matter what, he would not let go until this *thing* was no longer moving, whether it be by his fangs or by his pack leader's glowing talon.

As Zuska's weight brought the soldier down closer to her level, Tahiri grinned. Then she saw his pistol being raised to shoot at her, and the Battlelord's instincts kicked in. The Togruta sprinted

the last few meters and sprung into the air, reversing the grip on her lightsaber. Making the Marine look up, she brought her Vibrosword to bear down on his pistol hand, while her lightsaber found its mark as it slowly burned its way through the armor into the man's upper shoulder.

Sithspit. They have stronger armor than normal.

Her Vibrosword had pinned the man's hand to the ground, while Zuska pulled on the other. Tahiri heard a slight gurgling noise as she wrenched her saber back and forth, doing as much damage as possible to the inside of the soldier. The Battlelord let her illusion dissipate, which she knew meant that the other three soldiers would bear their attention on both her and their comrade. The soldier in front of her may have been bigger, but with the lightsaber buried deep inside him, the man had no way to resist while she used him as a living shield. The other Hive Mind Marines opened fire as Tahiri ducked behind the body of the man in front of her.

As the man began to fall limp, Tahiri commanded Zuska to let go, withdrawing both her blades from the body. With a brief burst of telekinetic energy, she lifted the fresh corpse and threw it at the other soldiers. Hearing a small whimper from her left, Tahiri glanced at Zuska. A stray shot had hit Zuska's front leg, making him limp.

Even though Tahiri wasn't sure how much damage the shot had truly done, all she could see now was red. Feeling the rage rising within her, the Togruta dropped her Vibrosword, howling as she unleashed a powerful stream of lightning directly at two soldiers, stunning them briefly. The third barely got out of the way in time, ducking into the doorway of a classroom.

Tahiri had done so well in keeping the rage bottled up, ever since Tarentum had fallen. Even when Plagueis had been attacked, she had kept it in reserve. Now, all she wanted to do was unleash all the emotions that had built up inside her. That is exactly what happened.

Letting go was hard for Tahiri, but now she let it all go. An incredible feeling overwhelmed her senses. It augmented every part of her body, and she felt the living Force flow freely through her. An evil grin spread across her face as she reignited her Rune lightsaber, also grasping a pair of throwing knives in her off hand. Her eyes, through the Force, found the weakest points in her enemies' armor. Upon viewing said flaws, she sprang forward, expertly throwing and guiding the knives to the right places on one soldier, while she simultaneously attacked the other soldier with her saber.

Even as her saber glanced off the resistant armor, Tahiri's foot came up and hooked the Marine's helmet. Twisting her body, she forcefully pulled the helm off. Upon seeing the pale-skinned bald thing in front of her, the Togruta felt disgusted.

Just like the Huntresses. No individuality, no unique features. Nothing different.

She swiftly unsheathed her second red Vibrosword, and before the Marine could react, she dealt a deft strike that liberated his head from shoulders. Sensing a barrage of pistol fire from the doorway, she jumped back a bit, deflecting the bolts instinctually. Tahiri could feel a small bit of fatigue begin to creep into her body. She had to end this quickly. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw, with relief, that Zuska had engaged the other soldier.

His wound mustn't have been too bad. Time to end this fight and get back to others.

Falling back into the Force, Tahiri turned her attention towards the unharmed Hive Mind Marine. As she advanced upon his location, the Marine retreated into the classroom, where there would be more room to take her on. The crimson red plasma of her saber blade deflected his otherwise expertly aimed shots harmlessly away from her person. Instead, the shots impacted the floor, walls, and ceiling of the classroom. There was a single moment of hesitation in the soldier's progress into the center of the room. He lobbed a small device towards Tahiri's feet, and a small pop could be heard as it landed and began to fill the room with smoke.

"Well, that's unfortunate for you."

Tahiri's grin widened as she tilted her head. Extinguishing her saber's red blade and clipping the hilt back onto her belt, she crouched down. Stealthily, she moved to her right, listening as the soldier's heavy armor moved and chafed as he looked for her within the thick smoke. She reached for her black-out Vibrosword, then realized, silently cursing herself, that it was on the ground next to the first dead soldier.

Switching her red Vibrosword to her right hand, she pulled out her Vibro dagger. She rose slightly and began to make her way around and over the desks towards her prey. Having Montrals instead of ears gave her an advantage in situations like this, even though her eyes slightly watered due to the irritating smoke.

Inching forward on top of the desk near the Marine, her knee accidentally nudged a datapad left by an evacuating student, knocking it off the edge of the table. As it hit the floor, the Marine turned in her direction and let loose a volley of blaster bolts. Tahiri leapt over most of them, one bolt grazing her lower left calf, and landed behind the Marine. Going down on her left knee, partially to save her leg from further injury, she thrust her Vibro dagger with all her might into the inner portion of the soldier's left thigh, aiming right for the main vein. The Marine yelped and tried to punch the Togruta in the head, but Tahiri simply rolled to the side, dragging her blade out as she twisted away. Another barrage of bolts came at her as Tahiri sought out cover. Bumping into a desk, she quickly found the edge and hunkered behind it.

The smoke had begun to dissipate, leaving a thick layer on the floor. As Tahiri stood from behind the desk, she saw that the soldier was on one knee, the iron-like smell of blood filling the air. The Marine tried to stand but couldn't; instead, he raised his pistol to fire. Tahiri called upon the Force, grasping the soldier's arm, turning it up and away from her, a single bolt from

his blaster firing directly into the ceiling. She came around the desk, concentrating on keeping the soldier at a disadvantage. Then she sheathed her dagger and sword, giving herself over to the Force as the soldier began to rise in front of her.

“I don’t know how much of a unified mind you Hive Minds have. But I hope the rest of your kind can feel this, and know that this will be their fate if they cross me.”

Tahiri touched her finger tips together, as the soldier's body suddenly straightened. Closing both hands into fists, she began to slowly pull her hands apart, as if she were tearing open a door with her bare hands. No yelp or screaming came from the Marine, only the sound of a body tearing itself apart, like a juicy melon fruit being ripped in two. Tahiri’s face was no longer grinning as the man suddenly burst apart, spraying her with blood. She grimly looked at the two halves and then let the pieces of what was once a man fall to the floor.

She looked at her hands as they began to tremble; the Force augmentation and adrenaline was beginning to subside. Fatigue began to creep once more into her body. Maybe she could sit down and rest for just a moment. A bark-howl brought Tahiri back, making her push the exhaustion away so she could run out of the classroom and into the hallway, unclipping her lightsaber as she went. She watched as Zuska was still struggling with the last Hive Mind Marine. The Vornskr had the soldier pinned to the floor and was tearing into his right shoulder and arm. The soldier was trying to punch and kick the creature in an attempt to get him off, but once Zuska had his prey within his grasp, there was no way he was letting go, unless Tahiri told him to.

Calling to Zuska, the Vornskr let go and retreated to her side, as she approached the fallen Marine. Igniting her saber, she swiftly fell upon the chest of the soldier, pushing her blade straight through the visor of the Marine’s helmet. The soldier fell still, his left hand grasping her leg. Shaking the hand off, Tahiri stood and pulled her blade from the body. Looking around, she took in the devastation of her small battle. Looking further down the corridor she spotted the bodies of a few young students and an instructor. She and Zuska had arrived too late to help them, but there were four less Hive Mind troupes in the battle, so Tahiri took joy in her small victory.

“Come on Zuska, let’s head back back to the docking bay real quick and get you patched up. We need to report to the Dread Lord and the rest of teams, warn them that things are here. But they can be beat”

After picking up the blacked-out Vibrosword she had dropped earlier in the fight, and retrieving her throwing knives, Zuska and Tahiri took off back to the turbo lift. The Togruta sent a mental message to Kera, asking the Varactyl to meet them at the lift entrance. It would be her turn for a small ride.