

The Beast of Caperion

A Submission to the Competition:
[CSP] Halloween Jamboree – Caperion Tales of Terror



Written by
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38 ABY

[Location Redacted], Caperion System

It was nighttime when the shuttle touched down on the planet. The bright glow of a full moon hung overhead as they stepped off the craft, casting an eerie blue, otherworldly light onto their surroundings. Reiden and his team had been sent to explore the small world in the hopes of finding any resources the clan could use to their benefit.

So far, the group had yet to find anything of interest. The area around their shuttle had been rocky and barren of plant life. But on a planet covered in endless mountain ranges, large forests, and even larger oceans, one couldn't be too picky about where to land. Scree skittered underfoot as Reiden walked, picking his way carefully to ensure that he didn't lose his balance and tumble downhill. He risked a glance down the slope of the mountainside he was traversing. Many large boulders had come to rest on the slope, mixed in with jagged rocks jutting up from the ground.

That would be a bad way to go, he thought to himself grimly.

"Sir, it looks like we've found something over here," a voice called out. Reiden recognized it as belonging to Major Keith Davis.

Reiden turned towards the group. Major Davis stood by a rocky outcropping with Orion Gale. Commander John Riley was also there, recognizable by the orange pauldron attached to his armor. A few other soldiers were also there, but Reiden had never met them before. The other usual members of Scholae's Imperial Army had already been deployed on other missions, so he had been assigned these soldiers instead. While he always preferred to work with a team he knew and trusted whenever possible, the reality was that such a thing was never guaranteed. Nevertheless, he felt confident that the team he had assembled was competent and would be able to perform whatever task he asked of them.

He gave the soldier a wave of acknowledgement and made his way over to the group. "What have you got, Davis?"

"There's an entrance to a cave in this outcropping. We missed it at first because it was partially hidden from view by one of these damn boulders that are everywhere."

"Any idea how deep it goes?"

"We sent one of the soldiers in," Riley replied with a jerk of his thumb at the cave's entrance. "He said it goes back pretty far. Didn't want to go further without letting us know."

"Smart thing, considering how easy it can be to get lost in cave systems if you're not careful," Orion added.

Reiden strode over to the entrance and peered inside. What light from the moon managed to penetrate its depths only revealed a distance of several feet. Beyond that, it was nearly pitch black inside. Luckily, they had come prepared, and he had one soldier retrieve glowrods from the shuttle. The soldier returned and the others attached the small lights to the barrels of their blasters. Reiden stepped into the mouth of the cave, the others following behind him. He pulled his lightsaber from its holster and held it out in front of him, igniting it. The viridian blade crackled to life and cast a sickly green pall over the walls of the cave.

Just as Riley had said, the cave was deep. The path in front of him curved to the left slightly, but it stretched on as far as he could see. Reiden had no idea what the cave held, but something told him that they should see where it would take them — and by then his curiosity had taken hold — so he pressed on.

They followed the path for some time. The tunnel began to widen, eventually opening into a large chamber. The ceiling was high and several tunnels branched out in different directions. The group spread out, casting the light from their glowrods across the floor and walls. There was nothing there — at least, nothing of interest to the clan.

Reiden spun about in a slow circle as he took in the chamber, a feeling of unease settling in. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this...”

Orion was crouched on the ground nearby, examining something. “Yeah, you could say that again.”

Reiden tilted his head, looking at his friend. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve got claw marks here...big ones.”

“We’ve got some here, too” Davis replied.

“And here,” Riley added with a grunt.

Reiden turned around again, more slowly this time. He held his lightsaber out to illuminate the area. There were claw marks everywhere. And Orion was right; whatever left them must have been quite large, judging from their length and width, not to mention how deep they had been carved into the surface.

A loud noise cut off any further thought. It started low and rumbling, quickly growing into a fearsome bellow. It seemed as though the beast that had made the markings of the chamber had risen from its slumber. A second, even louder roar filled the air. The sound shook Reiden’s bones and filled him with a growing sense of dread. This was only reinforced when he heard the scuffle of claws on rock as the beast moved. He thought it may be big, but based on the sound it made, it seemed like it could also be more agile than he would have expected it to be. Either way, he and his team would soon find out for

themselves — there was no way they could get to the mouth of the cave in time before the creature was upon them.

The creature soon appeared in the chamber from one of the tunnels that led to the chamber. This one happened to be opposite the one Reiden and his group used to get there. The beast was large, as they had suspected. His best guess put the beast at a similar size to a rancor, though it moved on all fours. Each limb ended in paws which held four long, curved claws. It was covered in pebbled, leathery skin; the lights showed that it was colored a dark green. Its mouth bore large teeth, including enlarged fangs that protruded from its upper jaw and out of its mouth, much like some feline predators Reiden had seen in images in the past. Its eyes were amber yellow in color and seemed to glow, but perhaps that was merely a trick of the light. The creature even had a long tail, ending in what looked like yet another claw. All in all, Reiden wouldn't have been surprised to see such a beast show up in a holomovie. It was a frightening sight to behold, and no doubt one of the top predators of the planet.

Before Reiden could react, the beast began to pick up speed as it came at them. They scattered to the sides of the chamber. The soldiers opened fire on the creature. It bellowed in pain, but seemed to shrug off the bolts. If anything, the attack only served to further enrage the creature.

It charged at the nearest soldier. The frightened man unleashed his blaster at the creature on full automatic. Blaster bolts lanced across the rapidly diminishing space between the two. Another roar filled the air. The beast slowed, but only slightly, and continued its advance. The soldier screamed in panic and turned to run. But it was too late, the beast was upon him. A large paw swept through the air and sent the man flying into the cave wall. The claws rent a gash in the stark white armor. The man crashed against the wall with brutal force. He didn't move. The beast lumbered over and lowered its maw to the man's neck and sank its teeth in. There was another scream, followed by a sickening cracking and crunching as powerful jaws clamped down, crushing armor and tearing through flesh. Now there was only silence. The beast turned to face the others, blood dripping from its fangs.

"Open fire!" Reiden shouted, shaking off the shock. "Do it, now! Give it everything you've got!"

The others fired volleys of bolts at the beast. The combined onslaught seemed to give it pause. Reiden could only guess that it hadn't encountered such weapons before. But he knew it was likely only a temporary measure as it assessed the new danger. Not wanting to give it more time, the Force user leapt into action. He quickly closed in on the beast and brought his lightsaber up, delivering a vicious two-handed slash to the beast's rear flank.

To his surprise, the plasma blade was unable to penetrate as deeply as he had thought. The beast bellowed in pain and anger. Its long tail flicked wildly, making contact

with Reiden and sending him flying back. It was only by luck and close proximity to the beast that he was hit with the middle of the tail, rather than the clawed end. Even so, the force of the blow was strong and knocked the breath from his lungs.

The beast reared up on its hind legs and unleashed a roar. It charged at another one of the new soldiers in Reiden's group. Acting quickly, Reiden extended a hand and swept it to the side, sending out a wave with the Force that pushed the soldier out of harm's way. The soldier recovered and fired on the beast. The others joined in. But it was a futile effort.

"Retreat!" Reiden shouted above the cacophony of blasterfire. "Get into the tunnel and get out of here!"

Orion was the first to react, running to the entrance to the tunnel. Once there, he turned and took up a firing position, shooting at the beast. He covered the retreat of the other soldiers as they followed him. They kept firing as they quickly backed away.

With the beast distracted, Reiden made his move again. He closed the distance between them and bringing his lightsaber up in a vertical strike at the base of the beast's tail. Unlike before, the weapon proved effective this time. The tail was sliced clean off, falling to the ground with a thud. The beast howled in pain. While it wouldn't stop the beast, it was at least one less thing for Reiden to worry about.

Orion and the soldiers kept firing. The amount of wounds being inflicted on the beast seemed to finally slow it down and make it rethink its course of action. Unfortunately, it also seemed to be stubborn and wouldn't back down from the fight. Reiden watched it carefully as it turned to face him. His eyes tried to pick up on any sign that it would attack.

After a moment, the beast seized an opportunity and quickly advanced on his prey. Reiden waited until the last second to dive to the side, landing with a roll. He rose to his knees and drove the blade of his lightsaber into the beast's side. The blade managed to penetrate the thick hide. The beast slumped a bit but remained mostly upright. Fire was in its eyes as it looked at Reiden. But he wasn't going to give the creature a chance to counterattack.

He quickly pulled his saber free and ran to the tunnel. The Force fueled his muscles and gave him a boost of speed. He waved the others on as he did so. Glancing back, he saw the beast begin to recover. It moved tentatively, a noticeable limp to its movements on the side where Reiden had stabbed it. He grabbed a thermal detonator from his belt and pressed the button to arm it. He proceeded along the tunnel and threw the explosive after a couple of seconds, then ran faster.

A loud explosion erupted behind him. The blast damaged the tunnel and sent rubble crashing down to the floor of the cave. The entrance to the chamber was soon cut off by the debris. Even so, the group continued to run through the rest of the tunnel. Before long

they stumbled into the moonlit glow of the mountainside. They paused to catch their breath, nobody saying a word.

Reiden activated his comlink and advised the pilot of their shuttle to begin preflight preparations and to get ready to leave as soon as possible. With that settled, the group set out to return to the shuttle at a brisk pace. They didn't want to stick around any longer than they had to. On top of that, they had no way of knowing how long the tunnel collapse would keep the beast at bay. Based on the other tunnels that led to the chamber, Reiden felt certain that there was more than one way out of the cave system. There might even be more than one such beast. With all that uncertainty, it made no sense to take the risk.

Once back at the shuttle, everyone piled in and the pilot took off. They quickly made their way beyond gravity's reach of the planet and into orbit. It was only then that Reiden placed his lightsaber hilt back into its holster and allowed himself to sit down. His work was not done, however. He borrowed a datapad from one of the soldiers that had stayed aboard the shuttle while he and the others explored the planet.

Reiden got to work typing up his report on what they had found. He spared no detail in describing the nightmare of what they had found hidden deep within the cave system. He had to make certain that precautions would be taken if future exploration of the surface was to take place. At the end, he also included a note that it was his strong recommendation that the planet be left alone and any search for resources be conducted elsewhere. It was his opinion that the risk involved far outweighed any potential benefit. Of course, the final decision was out of his hands, and this was all he could do. Only time would tell if Scholae Palatinae would come into contact with the beast on the planet again. Reiden sure hoped that wouldn't be the case.