

## Murky Waters

“Be careful in there.”

“I will.”

Those were the last words Qyreia heard before entering the service tunnels. Keira argued and chided about how she should be with her fiancée, but the mercenary had won out. It would be too cramped and confined in there; they would just get in each other’s way. Besides, there were still civilians outside the tunnels that needed rescuing and protecting. Plus, if she was really worried, their comms worked just fine even in the deepest parts of the service lines; at least that’s what the authorities told them.

The fact that the power was out, though, was not a pleasant addition to the already miserable condition that the Zeltron felt. She could ignore the ambient emotions that she felt through her race’s empathic field. The part that really bothered her was how this fiasco — how *Arcona* — had once again managed to ruin her plans.

*First it’s my vacation, she grumbled internally. Now it’s my karking wedding. I should be in fracking Zeltros right now getting fitted for a goddamn dress!*

Her feet splashed in the first traces of water that, up ahead, just barely visible in the emergency lighting, clearly got deeper. A few more steps, and it was already halfway up her calves.

“Aaand now we’re wet. Fan-fracking-tastic.”

As she sloshed deeper in, with the water level slowly passing her knees and up her thighs, she kept her rifle shouldered and ready. Part of her was relieved that they didn’t have time when the warning came out to grab her armor and big guns. Instead, it was the ‘old faithful’ model: A280, her hefty DL-44, and knife; all paired with her khaki-and-white clothes and leather jacket. There was also a flashlight the security team had given her as a precaution, but she kept it on standby to preserve her night vision. As the water leveled out just below her groin, she was at least thankful the water was nominally warm. Armored or not, she didn’t have much insulation.

*Schuttas’ll hear me coming a mile away.* Every movement, however slight, caused ripples in the water — a trickling sound when she moved slowly, a blatant splash if quick. It made the going awkwardly slow. She still remembered Atolli and the ambushes the creatures seemed to love. She wasn’t about to give it an easy meal.

As if all that weren’t bad enough, being this deep underwater brought up bad memories of the last time she’d been in a submarine facility. *Thank god Satsi isn’t here. She’d have a field day with me and the tentacle jokes.*

For all the activity happening outside, things inside the tunnel seemed to be far too peaceful. The quiet, save for the controlled splashes of her movement, made things eerie

and difficult to gauge the passage of time. It was a rather welcome surprise when her earpiece quietly started making noise.

*"Hey," came Keira's voice. "How's it going in there?"*

*"Oh you know. I'm just so wet right now."*

There was a pause. *"Okay, for once I can't tell if you're being literal or sexy, and the latter option is bringing up more than a few questions."*

"The tunnel's flooded up to my waist," Qyreia grumbled quietly, eyes watching the water ahead and the darker shadows for movement. "I do not, in fact, get off on danger."

*"The way you are when we get home from missions... I dunno..."*

"Frack you."

*"My point exactly. Also yes please."*

Qyreia couldn't help but roll her eyes. "How's things up in the real world?"

*"Pretty damp here too, honestly. I think I saw Ruka and Cora, but they were in a hurry and too far away to say hello."*

"And the things?"

*"Heard some, but haven't seen any. Pretty sure there's not as many as at the resort, so they're being more cautious."*

"Makes sense."

*"And I think your people are taking care of things pretty well."*

"Our people," the Zeltron corrected.

*"No, your people, Miss Quaestor. I just live here."*

Qyreia's eyes narrowed at a band of darkness in the corridor ahead, with none of the emergency lights functioning. "Alright, fine. Lemme call you back in a bit."

Another pause from the Force user as the realization settled in. *"Be careful."*

"You already said that... But I will."

She let the comm line close as she inched further along. The dark made it near impossible to tell how far away the distant red glow was beyond the expanse of blackness, prompting her to fumble for the little flashlight in her pocket, her other hand warily holding the rifle against her shoulder. Once free of her jacket, the merc turned the device in her hand until she could find the switch before holding it against her rifle in-line with the barrel, thumb hovering over the activator. Part of her wanted to keep it

off as long as possible and preserve her natural night vision, but it quickly became apparent that the already dim red light behind her was not enough to penetrate around her silhouette, and her eyes strained to make out even basic shapes in the imposing shadow.

“Frack it.”

Squinting to shield her eyes, she clicked the button, and the device came to life. For its size, it offered fair brightness and a moderate beam of light that traveled a dozen-ish meters before dispersing into gloom. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust, but the world did at least, within her little bubble, seem a bit brighter.

*Too bad this makes the tunnel look like a found-footage holo*, she internally lamented, noting especially how the shadows all seemed a lot starker with the yellowish white light cast against each surface.

Pipes and conduits were plainly visible now. Where before they were crude lumps of red and black in the emergency lighting, here in the light they were black and green, painted or sleeved, shown in true color and form. The water, by contrast, seemed more foreboding in the light. In the dark, *everything* was black. In the light, the water was dirty with grime, rainbow tinted on the surface by machine oils, but no less impenetrably opaque. For all its potency, the light offered no solace for what was still out of sight, hidden in the reddish-brown water.

Qyreia’s fingers flexed on the pistol grip of her rifle, eyes and ears hyperfocused on every sound and every ripple. Her pace unknowingly eked down to a crawl as the merc compensated and compensated for the sounds and motions she made as she waded through, seeing the far red lights as some sort of haven. Even though there was plenty of tunnel beyond that, and there was no telling where or how many of these things there were.

A slip of black floating in the water just below the lip of the pipework caught her attention, and in a blink her rifle was sighted on it, churning the morass as she did so. She stayed her hand in firing though, cautious as she was curious about how the shape didn’t move, even despite her clear hostility.

With her nerves on fire and her finger a hair’s breadth from squeezing off a shot, the Zeltron inched forward until she was right on top of the black blob. Carefully, she poked with the muzzle of her gun, then even more skittishly dipped it below the surface and hooked it underneath, bringing the sopping black mass dripping and pouring from the water and into the clear light.

Qyreia’s eyes squeezed shut as she breathed a sigh of relief. “It’s a mother frackin’ *glove*.”

In a huff of annoyance, she dropped the muzzle of the rifle back into the water with a splash, dumping the glove back into the sauce from whence it came.

“Goddammit.” For half a moment, she allowed herself a laugh at her own expense, running her flashlight hand through the few loose strands of hair that weren’t tied back into her little ponytail. “A karking glove?! Ha! Real funny, asshole!”

While her chuckle tapered off, thinking about the random engineer or maintenance worker that dropped it there, she made to continue her patrol. Only as she churned the water with another step, she felt a tug on her boot. When she tried to move her gun, the muzzle likewise wouldn’t budge.

Then the bubbles appeared.

“Frack.”

Everything happened in an instant. She pulled at the trigger and the blaster burst the water with red energy and a plume of scalding steam, just as the thing below the water tore at the Zeltron’s leg and gun, toppling her backwards into the murk with an even greater splash. Through the brown, her eyes caught the fuzzy glint of the flashlight as it sunk to the floor; felt her rifle get ripped from her grasp. Before she could suffer the same, Qyreia wrenched her foot away and swam for the surface, bursting up with a violent splash and gasp for air.

Profanity poured from her mind and in half-garbled sputters as she tried to right herself. Her hand frantically grasped for her pistol, practically tearing it from the waterlogged holster and brandishing it, eyes wide and searching.

And then everything was quiet again.

The mercenary’s breath shuddered, panning the small space with her pistol while oily water dripped over her face in a plethora of rivulets. Her voice growled, muttering quietly, spraying water with each breathy consonant.

“Come on out m’ther *fr’cker*.”

Silence.

Egregious silence.

Qyreia could feel the water on her leg where the thing had grabbed her, exposed, and unsure how deep it had cut. Too much adrenaline to feel the pain, much less worry about it. But in that sensitivity of sensation, she felt the water swirling. Close. Not her movement.

*It’s moving in the water under the pipes.* When it felt like there was too much movement at her ankle, the merc dove, twisting mid air to see a sleek paw and massive claws break the surface where she had just been. Her back in the water broke the

momentum, allowing her to quickly stand, watching for the next motion in the cloudy waters.

The flashlight, still lingering below the surface, gave off a weak glow, its light diffused in a strange sort of aura. In the instant the Qyreia had to right herself, a black shadow blocked out the light for a moment. *Got you now, fracker.* Whatever it was, it was angry and done with ambushes. It surged at the Zeltron, its form bowing out at the surface tension of the water.

She gave it a taste of energized tibanna, and then another in quick succession. Just like that, the charge floundered and flipped with an ear-rattling animalistic wail that echoed harshly on the duracrete walls and metal piping.

So she shot the thing again to shut it up.

Over and over, she shot into the thrashing creature, some blaster bolts dissipating off the water, sometimes giving the air a smell like cooked rancid meat. But every one of them was one more ounce of satisfaction for the Zeltron until it stopped moving entirely. Even then, as the body floated listlessly for a moment, she gave it a few more for good measure. One could never be too careful, and it was always better to be sure.

“How you like *that*, schutta?” She took half a step to approach when she felt the flow of water on her ankle again. *Right, I should probably check that.*

It took some effort to position herself on the pipes enough to expose the afflicted leg out of the water, but eventually she was able to seat herself and stairs around to see the damage. Her boot, and the sock underneath, were very clearly and cleanly split where the creature had grabbed her. Luck was apparently on her side though: the cut’s depth stopped just shy of her skin, with nothing more than the slightest split tissue at the extremes where the claws’ pressure had been greatest. It explained the lack of pain despite the adrenaline.

“Haha! Suck it, ugly! Frackmonsters nil, Red Qek a couple dozen!” She let her foot drop back into the water, kicking idly while her body slowed itself back down, noting with some disdain the glow of the flashlight mocking her. “Frack, I need to grab my stuff.”

Back in the water it was. With a little wading, she pushed past the floating corpse, letting it list over and bump unceremoniously against the wall. It gave her a good view, as one leg lolled out of the water, of the long claws attached to the thing’s feet. They looked like something from those animals that lived their lives hanging from trees. It didn’t seem too far fetched that this thing could do the same *and* cut through a leather boot, all with the same claws. She didn’t want to think about what might’ve happened if its grip had been just a bit better. She also didn’t want to think about it when she still had to dive back into the murk to collect her things. The flashlight was easy enough. Even through her eyelids, she could just follow the glow. Then it was back to the surface

for air, and back down again for her rifle. That took a little more time, and a lot more breath-holding. Fingers pawed at the metal surface of the floor, feeling it out, until she found a cylinder that jiggled, moved, and came up with her grasp.

“Aha!” she yelled as she broke the surface, rifle in hand. “Found you, you little bastard!”

For a moment, she considered heading back. In either case, she was going to be wet, probably miserable, and likely to run into another one of those things. But then there was the mission to consider. Other Arconans, other people out in Celeste that would be at risk. And of course, it would probably be for the best if she could get the water pumped back *outside* of the *underwater* city.

*They don't pay you to stand around, Q ol' girl.*

“I should call Keira first,” she mused, putting a hand to her ear to connect the comm. That is, until her hand touched her ear rather than the communicator that should have been there. Her eyes went to the water again. “...Sithspit.”

That took far longer to find.

When she finally came back up with the little device, it was with coughs and sputters, and no small amount of frustration. But she had it, at least. *Please be waterproof*, she thought as she shook it, listening for the telltale sloshing of water in the casing. It sounded surprisingly absent though, so with some hesitation, Qyreia put it in her ear and pressed the button to call.

The lack of electric shock was a good start. The only slightly garbled sound was even better.

*“Good timing. I was about to conscript a wealthy couple into going in to look for you. Very much not dressed for the occasion, either.”*

“I’m alright,” the Zeltron said, wiping a wet lock of hair off of her face and back with the rest of the blue strands. “How’s things up there?”

*“You know that feeling like the calm before the storm?”*

That didn’t sound good. “Yeah?”

*“It’s like that. We’re doing okay, but something feels... off.”*

“I’m gonna see about getting the drainage for this tunnel working, then I’ll come up and help you with whatever’s going on.”

After a few more pleasantries, they cut the call and each went about their way. For the Zeltron, that meant continuing down the waterlogged tunnel toward the distant red lights. Her objective was to hunt these *things*, but with the way her feet were swimming

in her own boots and how heavy her waterlogged jacket felt, draining the tunnel would be poetic justice. Fortunately, as she churned up the rust-colored liquid, there didn't seem to be any more of the creatures in the immediate vicinity. It made sense to Qyreia. They could cover more ground if they were spread out and, if one *had* been nearby, it almost certainly would have attacked at the same time as its brother-sister-thing.

Her mind went back to the earlier thought about Satsi and the tentacle jokes, remembering very pointedly how some of the creatures' variations included similar such appendages. She also remembered the eggs in people's chest cavities. *Yeah, let's not turn this into an Eastern Expanse porn holo.*

Fortunately, there seemed to be an abject lack of creatures for the rest of the blackout-afflicted length of tunnel. The maintenance monitors were trashed though, with only a rudimentary map etched into a metal plate bolted to the wall nearby — the kind common to industrial workplaces, but lacking in sufficient measurement scale. At least it showed the Zeltron where to go next, given the upcoming intersections of tunnels. She made mental notes as she passed through them to remember the way back as well. Given how unfamiliar she was with Celeste, even going back to the city level would leave her fairly lost. Ostensibly, this was easier.

There was at least one good thing to come out of her quest though. Wherever these tunnels were within the city, they were gradually rising, evidenced by the slight incline in the floor and the water levels dropping from the Zeltron's waist to below her knees.

"Might even manage to dry off," she whispered wryly to herself.

Despite the dim lighting, Qyreia eventually turned off the flashlight. It would preserve the power cell and allow her night vision to return; likely also helping her other senses pick up a little of the slack when she wasn't so hyperfocused on the visuals in the beam of light from the little device. *Just a little further.* Rounding a slight bend in the tunnel, she came up to where she expected the diagnostic station to be, and could see in the dim red emergency lighting the outlines of a computer terminal. Just next to it on the floor though, was a dark shape, hunched and slumped over.

Qyreia didn't even bother to complain about how she'd *just* turned the flashlight off before it was on again and her rifle was rigidly shouldered, ready to fire.

It was hard to tell at a distance what the shape was. Like the glove before, it remained unmoving, even when the pale light was cast over it. *The freaks always react once they're spotted,* Qyreia noted as she made her way forward, scanning around the lump just in case, but never so far as to totally take her eyes off it. Once within a few meters, the details became rather more apparent.

The water looked to have a slightly darker tinge listing around it. That was the first thing she noticed. Then it was the black shredded scraps of cloth clinging to the something that was underneath it. For a moment, she saw the long pointed tips that

reminded her of the claws of the creature she'd just fought, only to realize they weren't claws. They were ribs. Whoever this poor guy was, he was utterly eviscerated, disemboweled and torn apart in either vicious mockery of his existence, or in a desperate attempt to feed. Given how little was left of his actual flesh, the latter seemed very likely.

*You'd be hungry too if you swam all the way here from Atolli.* It explained how the creatures got here to Celeste; how they managed to linger so long in the rancid water just waiting for an ambush. They weren't large, but they were streamlined and vicious. The merc panned her flashlight around to quickly scan for whatever might be lurking, only to find nothing.

Then her eyes went back to the terminal. There on the frame, she could just make out the little blinking lights that said the power was on. Qyreia rushed to the monitor, seeing the first bit of tech still working that wasn't bathed in dead, red light.

"Ohh, come on baby, work for momma." Her fingers tapped at the screen, and it blinked on a black screen; the kind that said it was working and not just turned off. When the letters and numbers appeared, she nearly whooped for joy. "Yes! Alriiight, let's see where the break is, since all the *other* goddamn computers are broken."

Only as the text materialized through the boot sequence and into the actual program, Qyreia realized she had no idea how this system operated. Her eyes fixated on the screen as she tapped away at the controls, trying to figure out how to access the diagnostic functions, ending up at maintenance logs first, then systems component list. On and on through a seemingly never ending series of menus and submenus that, for an uninitiated such as her, was increasingly frustrating to try and navigate. When she *did* finally find the selection she was looking for, it showed only a small selection of the vast network of tunnels, with a blinking marker almost right on top of her position, marked as *critical failure*.

"I need the location of the *break*, you stupid computer, not *my* location! Ugh!"

She tapped and zoomed, trying to figure out what the problem was, but it just kept pinging her location. The Zeltron even managed to connect the screen to the pump system, only to have the blinking red marker continue to mock her with its existence. It was unsurprisingly frustrating.

Her fist slammed some piping adjacent to her workstation. "Goddammit, what's *wrong* with this thing?!"

She glanced down at her rifle, propped against the myriad of pipes and electrical boxes, and a thought occurred. With a cursory check of the system map to orient herself, Qyreia wound her head to look through the morass of technical baubles, angling the little flashlight here and there to look for this apparent issue. The break in the line was nearly invisible, black on black, as the beam of light passed over it. But there it was: a thick



power cable, inactive from automatic emergency processes to prevent electrocution, severed clear through with some apparent mangling to go with it.

“Gee,” she grumbled sardonically, “I wonder what could have done that.” Her gaze wandered briefly back the way she came, where she knew there was a creature corpse floating. “Fracker.”

The merc’s feet splashed in the water as she reoriented her position to reach the cable, now that she knew where it was. There were other minor damages, but they seemed superficial at most. The break in question though, as she got her hands on it, was very clearly beyond her immediate repair skills, given that she had absolutely zero maintenance equipment. Grenades, blasters, and even a medpack, but not so much as a hydrospanner on her belt.

“Son of a schutta.” Just as she was about to give in to her continually growing frustration, a thought entered her head, and her gaze turned to the desiccated corpse. her expression was deadpan, but sour. “You’re a maintenance dude, aren’t you.”

It was less a question so much as resigned realization. The heap of ravaged flesh and blood-stained bones, if he *was* a maintenance worker, likely had tools on him. Tools that probably were just sitting on the floor below the waterline or, if she was unfortunate, somewhere in the mess of viscera where his pelvis was. Qyreia swallowed back a nauseous knot in her throat, hoping that it settled in her stomach rather than rebelling and coming back up along with her last meal.

“Here goes nothing.”

At first she searched around where the worker’s waist might have been, hoping that maybe what she needed was just sitting right there. Nothing, however, was presenting itself, save for the remnants of a web belt that showed he was, in fact, down here to fix the systems. The Zeltron moved closer, crouching by the body to, with mild disgusted hesitation, dip her hand into the bloody water to feel out the floor. Almost immediately her hand fell on something rigid, and she mentally prayed that it was a tool and not a bone. When her hand came up, it was the panacea tool of most maintainers: a hydrospanner. *Oh thank you, god.* With a sigh of relief, she pocketed the device and dove her hand back in for more.

Sifting through the murk, she hesitated at every sensation. Despite all the gore she’d waded through on Atolli, performing emergency C-sections on egg-laden people despite having *zero* training or experience in doing so, this was still well outside of her comfort level. Even the stuff at the resort had been more out of adrenaline-fueled desperation and a lack of anyone else willing to try, than a sense of placidity with the situation. She came up with a length of coupling cable — something to link two broken pieces as a patch job — when she heard a clinking noise from above.

Tunnels liked to echo sounds, including those of rigid materials creaking against temperature fluctuations. Those were all natural noises. But some gut feeling had her look up, panning the flashlight in her off hand along with her gaze, up into the lines and rows of pipes and conduits.

There, hanging from a mid-sized pipe, was a felinoid creature much like the one she'd killed, the same lengthy claws curled around the metal to hold it aloft as it quietly inched closer, hanging upside down.

Until it realized it had been spotted. Then its tail curled around the pipe to give the front paws room to angle for a pounce.

"Well... Guess I was right about the hanging from trees thing."

The muttered words were mere filler to the brief, tense moment of silence while they both stared each other down. Then the creature leveraged its legs and shot at the Zeltron.

Her rifle was still propped up and out of reach, and her pistol was still holstered. With a mental burst of profanity, Qyreia lurched backward into the water. If she couldn't shoot the thing, she'd at least be able to bring back what the Wookiees used to call *Iron Shin*. In the blink of space between them, the merc threw her legs up as she rolled back, connecting with the creature's face in a kick that catapulted it over the Zeltron to crash in the shallow water some meters away. It offered her just enough time, as the thing recovered, to roll forward onto a knee and draw her pistol.

The felinoid had just started to charge again, bounding from the water to the wall and leaping again at the near-human, when she fired. She managed two shots before the sleek quadruped crashed into her, a mass of dead weight that sent her backwards into the murk.

For several heartbeats, Qyreia thought she was dead, or about to be: torn to ribbons and mauled like no other. Only the thing didn't move. Heaving off the flooring below the water's surface, she threw the body off of her, letting it slump off to the side as she once again sprayed the foul water off her lips with her sputtering breaths. There was some grim satisfaction in her heart and mind until she felt something sticky on her neck. Not like wet hair though, that moved when she turned her head. Still holding her gun, she picked at the sensation with her fingertips as brought back, under the flashlight's illumination, a chunk of dark brownish-red goop.

Part of her already knew what it was, but she turned where she sat anyway, to see a large head-sized dent in the former workman's corpse. She looked at the goop in her hand again, the cogs in her head turning just slow enough for her to pause.

Then she freaked out.

"Euugh! Eww ew ewewew!"

Qyreia lurched forward, hopped onto her feet away from the body, jumped up and down several times in abject disgust, clawing at the back of her neck to get the stuff off of her. When that just seemed to spread it, or so her panicked mind told her, she threw herself into the dirty water even further from the body and wiped frantically at her hair, neck, and upper back. Even when she felt she'd gotten all, if not most of it, she still felt a creeping feeling along her spine as she stood back up.

"Guegh. *Frack...* Uugh, *man*, sleeming fracknugget Hutt slime... uuuugh." She looked at the body, her shoulders rolling to fight off the nervous twitches. "No offense bud, but I'm pretty sure you'd feel the same if it was the other way around."

As the cringe subsided, or she mustered the courage to ignore it, Qyreia made her way back to the body, collecting up everything she'd dropped and kicking the creature's body out of spite. Then it was back to searching, grumbling to herself about how she'd *just* started to dry off, and managing to find more tools amid the muddy water. Despite being understandably nervous about confining herself during the repair work, she wanted the drains working far more than she worried about another attack. The creature encounters were supposed to be rare enough that the two she'd had in such a small span of time and space meant she was probably safe for the time being.

The conduit got fixed, though. After a few soldering burns on her fingers and some pinched skin from being a little too reckless with the hydrospanner, the merc managed to link up the conduit pieces with the patch line. She'd done similar damage control on her ships, so it wasn't a *completely* foreign operation; just with much larger pieces to work on. There were other pieces that needed only a lighter touch, but still necessary. When all was said and done though, she returned to the terminal to see the blip was now in the yellow: functional, but requiring dedicated repairs.

"Frack it, let's turn this schutta on."

If there was one advantage to her earlier frustrations in searching for the diagnostics map, it was her newfound knowledge of where most of the functionalities were located in the system. In only a few button presses, Qyreia found her way to the pump systems and, with a very satisfied grin, turned it on.

The tunnels carried a subtle echo throughout her general zone that was reminiscent of a draining bathtub. Dumping the tools that she no longer needed and grabbing the hind legs of her dead quarry, the Zeltron started making her way back the way she came, toward the entrance to the service tunnels. Even better was how, by the time she got to the first creature's body, the water was hardly at the soles of her boots. The lights were still out — some other power outage that she was less concerned about — but at least there was no more liquid for the bastards to hide in. With her rifle slung on her shoulder and the pistol holstered, she grabbed up the other creature and started hauling its body too. Out of the water, it was even more clear that these creatures were as large

as their ferocious attacks made them seem. But they *were* vicious. Their deaths would likely be a good dent in their presumably limited numbers.

When Qyreia reemerged from the tunnels, it was to a small ring of security personnel, placed there to keep anything from escaping *into* or *out of* the tunnels. Their reactions to the bodies were impressed. Some, in perusing the scene, looked at the Zeltron with awkward, cocksure grins.

“What’re *you* looking at?” she sneered at one as she passed.

“Nice underwear,” he shot back, still staring.

The Zeltron looked down to note, with no small amount of frustration, the usual result of wearing a white shirt and being soaked with water. She flapped the cloth off of her skin and black bra to at least hide some of it, briefly ignoring the wry chuckles and laughter from the guards before she stared at the one that had been staring so intently. His smile pissed her off.

To her pleasure, it disappeared when she twisted and threw her shin up between his legs. As he crumpled to the ground, wheezing for breath and clutching his groin, Qyreia panned her view to the others assembled there.

“Anyone *else* wanna be a smartass?!”

A general flinch went up throughout and they all seemed to take half a step back.

“Didn’t think so.” A series of rapid steps caught her attention and she turned her head to see Keira jogging up. “Hey babe.”

Her Force user fiancée slowed and cast a momentary glance at the writhing man on the ground. “You okay?”

“Fine.” She nodded her head away from the group, and they walked off while the guards mocked and assisted their injured comrade. “Got two in the tunnels, and the water’s pumped out.”

“That’s good,” Keira said, noting how the fabric clung to the red woman with a certain glint in her eyes. “I don’t think I’ve seen you rail on someone like that since we were in Naga Sadow.”

Qyreia allowed herself a grin. “Back when we were still dating?”

“Before *that*, even.” She leaned in close to whisper. “You know, you’re pretty hot when you fight.”

“I’m sorry, weren’t *you* joking that *I* get off on danger earlier?”

“Right, but this isn’t danger. *This* is my Red Qek.” The Force user snuck a hand to Qyreia’s rear and gave it a quick squeeze, drawing a slight hiccup in the latter’s step. “And Iron Shin, I think you said they called you when you were working on Kashyyyk?”

The Zeltron smirked a little that she remembered the stories. “Yeah.” A sigh passed her lips. “How’s that gut feeling you had going?”

Keira sucked in her lips, almost nervous. “Not any better.”

“Then ya should probably hold onto that libido of yours until this is over.” She looked out at the domed city. “Because I get the feeling that we’re not nearly done with this yet.”