

Tipool City Dandora, Doran System

Qyreia watched each corner carefully as she passed through the riotous streets. Normally she would be aiding in whatever fight was going on, but this was an oddly special circumstance. Between the internal fighting of the factions, the overt battles with their sworn nemeses, and the Hutt forces that were presumably just trying to keep what passed for peace on Dandoran, there was plenty enough chaos to last a lifetime. When she saw the intel vids and imagery of the crystal *things* running around, the Zeltron merc decided there weren't enough credits in the galaxy to warrant getting knee deep in this fight.

What *did* catch her interest was the talk of a "flying mudball" that brought down a bunch of lightsaber-wielding folk, headed by a skull-wearing matron. To say nothing for the other factions, the Harmonists wanted details on this woman, and those details would likely be on that ship, among other things.

"Gonna be interesting at least," she muttered quietly.

The R3 droid at her heels whirred in agreement at an equally low volume.

She adjusted the sniper rifle in her arms and bounced gently on the balls of her feet as the street seemed to clear itself of life. "You ready, Remster?"

Brwiirw!

"*Quieeet.*"

Brwiirw, it repeated again at a much lower volume, almost apologetic in the wake of the initial outburst.

R3-M3, or Reme, crossed the street first, its owner crouched low and scanning up and down both directions of the street to cover the droid. Its wheels rumbled quietly over the pavement until it reached the next alleyway, stopping and turning its dome to flash an 'all clear' to the Zeltron. With a final scan, noting some shades of movement at the far end in the direction of the distant grand casino, Qyreia lurched forward onto her feet and dashed across. Despite the distant sounds of combat, the rhythmic beat of her footsteps sounded loud compared to the relative quiet of their abandoned avenue. It seemed a relief when she was finally on the other side, left with only the slight increased labor in her breaths.

"Okay buddy. Where to next?"

It wasn't often that Qyreia brought her droid with her into a combat zone. Oftentimes the terrain was just too rough, or her vehicle choice didn't support mounting an astromech. The smooth decks of a space station, or the 'crete paths and streets such as these, however, were a prime location. If it wouldn't have been so obvious, she might

have just brought them right up close with her X-Wing. Some things just weren't worth risking.

So she followed her droid through the varied and winding alleys, using its internal databanks and positioning systems to guide them both to where they needed to go: the Tipool City center. At times they came close to a firefight or, worse, the telltale screams of one of the crystalline creatures' victims, forcing them to skirt wide around the encounters. At others, when the terrain was nominally clear of opposition, they followed as with the other street, with R3 leading the crossing under Qyreia's watchful eye, followed by the Zeltron herself. In every case, there were plenty of bodies to indicate where the pair crossed through an earlier bout.

"We getting close yet?" the merc whispered to the droid as they came to a broad intersection.

Drrt bree-wrpdoot woOoo.

She sighed. "Alright. We'll cross this one, same as usual. Sound good?"

Remee responded with a positive '*Bweep*' and they continued onward.

For all the distance they had to cover and weave through, it was at least for good reason. The Severians, to say nothing for the Harmonists specifically, had set up their bases of operations at a fair distance from the Revenants'. The fortunate side effect was that both headquarters had a decent buffer area from where the creatures were originating and operating. The downside, though, was that it left a good ways for Qyreia and her droid to go.

So for what seemed the twentieth time this trip, Qyreia scanned the area ahead through the narrow band of view offered by the alley and, satisfied that all was clear, she motioned R3-M3 forward. Remee *whirred* its engines, rolling across the pavement as he always did, with its dome rotating left and right to search for anything its master might miss.

Both of them missed the shooter that sent a bolt of green energy into the road surface just off the droid's right; a good thing that the shooter missed, too.

Remee's bionic squeal of panic echoed off the various buildings. Its previously straight line of travel became a haphazard zig-zag, which very likely spared him the shots that followed one after another. Qyreia cursed under her breath at the sight, rounding the corner with her rifle at the ready. She knew the shooter was up high from the angle of the blaster bolts, so her attention immediately went up the building's face.

Poking out from a third or fourth story window was the muzzle of the gun in question, confirmed as it took yet another shot at her droid. Only the gun showed though: the merc couldn't see any of the assailant's shootable features. *Quit shooting at my karking droid you Hutt-humping rancor perineum.* Her feet moved steadily further

and further out into the street, glancing beyond her scope for other guns in other windows, but her focus ever remained on the one that was aiming for the R3.

“Son of a schutta, *hold still* you bolt bucket!”

The muffled voice filtered down from the window, and Qyreia sneered as she aimed at the window. *There’s his hand*, she thought as his limb came into view. *Just a little more... there!*

The shot rang out from her rifle in almost the same instant she saw the shooter’s head, sending the armor-piercing green bolt careening up, tearing away a chunk of the window’s exterior before the rest of the energy collided with his skull. The body fell away into darkness and the shooting stopped, allowing Qyreia a momentary sigh of relief before returning her attention to the droid and the task of getting across the street.

Once on the opposite side, she paused and crouched beside the R3 unit. “You alright there? Lemme take a look.”

Remee started to chirp and complain, only to be shushed by the Zeltron again. The continued banter was, as a result, put on minimal volume.

Most of the droid was fine, but a cursory perusal of a leg showed a peppering of asphalt up the lower third of the strut, as well as a small chunk melted and torn out of the wheel. *Gonna have to fix that when we get home.*

She patted the R3’s dome and offered a conciliatory smile. “Think you’ll be okay to keep rolling?”

Remee’s answer was somber, but affirmative.

“Okay. Gimme the map one more time then. We should be close.”

As ordered, the droid tilted its eye stalk down and powered on its holoprojector, giving a dim three-dimensional view of the area, with a small red marker for their position, and a generic green square for where the ship was expected to be. Just as she’d surmised, they were *very* close. Almost too close for her liking.

“Oookaaay,” she murmured, looking at the map, then at the surrounding structures. “Aight. I think I’ve got a plan.” The Zeltron looked pointedly at her droid. “You’re probably not gonna like it though.”

Remee’s response was somber, but affirmative.

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It wasn’t often that Qyreia got to use her grappling hook. She’d practiced with it, of course, but she couldn’t recall a time when she’d actively used the thing outside of the

training areas back on Selen. As she aimed and fired the projectile hook into the top of the building wall though, she was no less satisfied to feel the line tighten in her grip.

“I’ll see you at the ship, bud,” she said to her droid as she tied off her gear and started climbing the cable, rolling her eyes slightly at the worried Binary whine.

Hauling herself up took no small amount of effort. There were plenty of great methods to make rope climbing easier, but a free-hanging rope versus a cable butted up against a building offered certain challenges that meant either accepting some friction from the facade, or relying on arm strength and ‘walking’ up the side. Qyreia did a mix. So long as she got to the top, the rest didn’t matter too much.

Once able to pull herself over the lip and onto the mostly-flat dome of a rooftop, the merc pulled up the cable and her equipment attached at the other end. It was awkward and scraped the building’s side more than once, but it was far easier than trying to climb with all of it attached to her person. Remeë watched nervously from the ground, for its own sake as well as its master’s.

She wanted to call down and reassure the droid, but that would make too much noise in the wake of an already loud gunfight within relatively close proximity to the enemy ship. From her newfound vantage, Qyreia could even see combat far down either direction of the street, the chaos spreading further and further from the epicenter. Littering the length were blotches and dots on the road’s surface: some unmoving bodies, some mere remnants of viscera. She needed to get this sorted, and fast, lest she get caught up in the fracas.

Okay, next step of the master plan.

This ‘next step’ was almost too literal. Her gray-blue eyes scanned the gap to the next building, judging the distance practicable and, after a few steps back for extra momentum, surging forward in a leap of faith. She always hated doing these kinds of things. It felt like a stone sank in her stomach and travelled to her feet to bring her down; always fearing that *down* would come sooner than she wanted.

It was why she was so quietly happy when she felt solid, horizontal roof under her feet as she hit, rolling and grating to a stop on the rough surface amid all her gear. *At least it’s not the ground after a twenty meter fall.*

Qyreia picked herself up and brushed off the dust and grit from her clothes before approaching the next gap. It was smaller this time, if a little more precarious for her need to mount the low wall that bordered the edge of her current rooftop. But it was done, and she was allowed a nice long, relaxing walk toward the Tipool City square. As she drew closer, her stance got lower and lower, until she was all but crawling up to the edge of the rooftop. She set aside her pack, hoping to reduce her silhouette, and eased the rifle forward to the sweet spot in the pit of her shoulder.

Sure enough, there was the ship they'd been looking for, in all its disgusting glory. The Eta-class shuttle was a splatter of colors that bespoke of rust, mud, and *moss*, somehow. It dominated the City Center, surrounded by bodies that were definitely a result of the so-called Crystal Ascendant.

Whatever the frack that is. "Alright Remster," she whispered into her comm, "it's all you now."

She didn't quite hear the response, but the faint sound of the R3 unit's wheels, clunking slightly on the one damaged tire, signalled that the droid was moving. Soon enough, she saw it scuttling out into the open space; the only thing moving across the smooth concrete surface.

That was, until a figure descended from the ship's boarding ramp.

Remeë stopped cold, muttering nervous strings of Binary as the figure drew closer and closer.

"*Rem,*" she hissed into the comm, "go. forward."

The droid sputtered forward once, then twice, bleeping and whirring nervously before continuing forward steadily. The move seemed to stir something in the figure, and it stopped its forward motion.

Qyreia eased her eye up to the scope. "Let's get a better look at you."

What she saw rather simply reminded her of any number of the members of the Brotherhood; especially among the nameless masses of Force sensitives that feigned overwhelming power: cloaks, hoods, and...

"S'that a karking *lightsaber*?"

No sooner had the words come out of her mouth than a shot of red erupted from the hilt in his hand — at least she thought it was a *he*. With the clothes, he, *it* could have been anything. All she knew was that the human-looking being was suddenly advancing on her droid again, and that was not acceptable.

"Just a little further..." she muttered, zeroing in her sights. "Little more..."

Remeë whirred in a panic, still trundling forward, all the way until the saber-wielder raised his blade high for a downward strike.

That was when Qyreia's finger squeezed the trigger, sending a high-powered bolt of green energy lancing at the apparent Force user. His head twitched and he turned with just enough time to block the shot just shy of his chest, though not without a little singeing on his sleeve as the impact forced the blade back a touch. He was near to recovering when he felt the briefest poke on his leg, with not even enough time to see the shock prod protruding from the droid before electricity shot through his whole body,

forcing him into standing convulsions. The Zeltron squeezed the trigger again while his muscles were thus indisposed, taking him full in the chest and knocking him backward, away from the droid.

She had expected another ambush. Maybe more than one person. There wasn't a lot of information about what this mysterious ship brought with it other than the skull-wearing woman and her crystalline creations. She hadn't expected *Force users*.

“Sorry about that, Reme. Wasn't expecting something like that. You okay?”

The response she heard echo from across the square was the most indignant bit of Binary she'd *ever* heard from her droid. Given what it just went through, she was willing to allow it.

“It's okay, Rem. Just keep going. Any more show up, you bring 'em out. Otherwise, get the data, and we'll get the kark out of here. Sound good?”

That seemed to at least appease the droid, as it spun its dome around and blinked out an *affirmative*. As the droid disappeared into the ship, silence once more took over the Tipool City Center, and Qyreia was left to watch, worry, and wait: either for her droid, or for another threat to show itself. She just hoped it wasn't one of the crystal things; Ascendant *or* Restoration troops.

The minutes crawled by, and she was starting to get worried when she heard a mechanical screech, though at this distance, it was hard to tell what droid emotion was behind it. When she saw R3M3 emerge from the vessel though, blinking “*victory*” at her, she allowed herself a little chuckle. Reme managed to slice the ship's databanks. They had what they needed. It was time to get the data back to the Brotherhood; maybe the Harmonists too. With it lingering in the droid's databanks, there wasn't much limit to how many copies she made.

“Good job, little guy,” she said over the comm, watching his triumphant stroll appreciatively. “Let's get back to the ship, and get the frack outta here.”

The cheerful droid-screech echoing across the square was all she needed for answer.