

The Great Serpent

When Edema received her orders to carry out reconnaissance on the mysterious creatures that had appeared amongst the enemy, she relished the idea. It would be a chance to test their skills and their newly acquired equipment, courtesy of her uncle. Edema was also somewhat weary of how her confidence in combat had waned of late, recent injuries, loss of limbs and other such events had caused her to slow down and re-evaluate how she engaged her enemies, this would be a good time to see if she still had what was needed. They were no strangers to the idea of Force manipulated and mutated creatures, Edema's mother-in-law was from a mysterious race whose origins began as creations of the ancient Sith. Throughout their journey within the brotherhood, both of the Sephi had studied ancient Sith texts during their journey through Aurora Collegium and as such were knowledgeable about such machinations and creations using the Force. It would be interesting to see if these were products of the Light, Dark or in fact neither.

The pair gathered their equipment, droids and weapons then departed onboard the *Nightfall Prism* towards the frozen plains where their quarry was located. The orbital scans showed a large cluster of the creatures were located on an ice shelf formed as part of a large glacier, deep in the frozen mountain regions of the north. Their droids were an interesting collection, KayCee was their primary pilot, formerly an Imperial combat droid, Edema had paid for modifications that made him more universal in function, his combat heuristic programming had been slimmed down and his piloting software enhanced making him a capable pilot who would still nail a gundark with his blaster rifle. Number 2 and PR3D470R were an...eclectic pairing, neither agreed with each other and both saw themselves as superior to just about everything, including each other. All three were however loyal and reliable companions and the pair of Sephi would have it no other way.

KayCee informed them that the glacier was approaching and that he would scan for a suitable landing position that would allow them to get close to their quarry without exposing the ship to possible hostile fire. This would be an interesting mission, neither of the two Mandalorians had a full understanding of what to expect, but Edema knew her own skill with illusions would probably be of great use against them. The ship landed on the frozen ice, sending up clouds of ice and dust as it settled and the ramp opened, out from the ramp shot the two armored Arconans followed by the two probe droids, the flames of their jetpacks illuminating the ice bound landscape. The group flew to a ridge that overlooked the area where their prey was and once there they settled in to observe and get an idea of what they would be up against.

Some thirty meters below them, wandered half a dozen of what they would describe as crystal beasts. Through her rifle sight, Jor'ana watched the mutated creatures and remarked how they bore a similarity to Sith chrysalis beasts of legend. Their bodies had an almost crystalline, icy appearance, some had talon-like wings, others multiple claws, their flesh if you could call it as such, looked almost like it was made up of ice. And then there was the music, both of them could hear the music. It was beautiful and haunting, floating through the air, it almost had a physical feeling to it that tried to tug at the two warriors, threatening to drag them away. The

song, this siren song, drifted on the air, its soothing tones and lilting ambience drove into your very being and Edema could feel something within it that was of a more sinister nature. Looking over at her cousin she could sense that Jor'ana was feeling it too, this was not the first time they had heard such a song, Edema's step-mother and many of her people had a similar song, used the lull opponents into a relaxed state, allowing them time to escape. They had both been brought up with this song, Edema had spent much of the youth that she remembered, with these people and in a way had become somewhat desensitized to its draw, this wasn't to say that she wouldn't listen, like her mother's songs, this beautiful sound was a joy to listen to. The Equite turned to Pred and gestured for him to come over and sent a message via a scomp connection, this sound needed recording and documenting, Pred's sensors and systems would be ideal for taking samples for later analysis.

Edema allowed herself a few moments to enjoy the sounds before she got back to the task at hand. They needed some direct research of these creatures, the first test would be to see if they were resistant to damage. Jor took aim, adjusting her sight so that her crosshairs would line up on the head of one of the creatures. She was an artist when it came to getting rounds on target without giving away a location and the slug left the barrel, skipped off a rock close to the target and drove through the creatures head, the explosive core of the round detonated, spraying the component parts of the creatures head across the area. Jor made a subtle gesture of joy at the success, these creatures were not bulletproof and did not appear to have any Force based defensive techniques like those blasted crystal monstrosities they had gone up against recently.

Now was the phase Edema both enjoyed and feared the most, she needed to get up close and personal with these creatures. Previously this would have offered her no issues but she was a different woman these days, literally in the case of her arms and left leg, opponents were getting bigger and tougher. She missed carving her way through infantry and pirates, they were much easier tasks than these horrific creatures they seemed to have to fight more recently but she needed to break out of her lowered confidence and, as humans say "get back on the horse", not that she had any idea what a horse was. Leaving her cousin on overwatch and support, she activated her jetpack and flew down to meet her foes. Five remained, two larger ones and three smaller ones. As she closed upon them, she unleashed a volley of darts from her recently upgraded lanvarok towards the three smaller creatures, the darts impacted on their targets and unleashed their terrible cargo, the cryoban liquid covered large areas of the target and the sephi watched as the chemical drew away all of the residual heat in the air around and the bodies of the targets, freezing the unfortunate creatures. Their siren song turned to howls of pain and anguish but it was quickly silenced by their death.

The final two creatures were significantly larger and very much aware of her presence and the threat she emanated. They unleashed a wave of song towards her, the siren sounds flooding her ears, it was so beautiful, and had she been there, then it would have been somewhat more effective against her, but the Sephi was not that daft. As she had approached the targets she had landed a good distance away, she needed to carry out this attack with less of her usual diving in and hoping for the best. Drawing on the Force she slipped into shadow, using her skills to vanish from view and slowly approached the creatures, it didn't take much to create the

illusion of her flying towards in glory, the minds of these creatures was relatively simple, despite their strength in the Force. Once close enough she sent the barrage of darts from her lanvarok towards the smaller foes, taking them out of the equation, then she followed up with the illusion landing before the two larger foes. She heard the barrage of song, she could feel the creature's strength in the Force, what surprised her was the fact it was neither light or dark but something of a melding of the two. Her illusion faded and she stepped out of her shadows, it took the creatures a few moments to comprehend what they were seeing, but a few moments was all Edema needed. Her blades ignited, she was almost on top of the creatures before they realized, flame and blaster fire from her gauntlet engulfed one of the creatures as the Forceshield and repulsor deflected a volley of blows from the other. The tiny ports on her left gauntlet lit up, and without warning a dozen lethal darts, whistling birds, made their way to the creature engulfed in fire, the beskar tipped darts punched through the creatures carapace as if it was flimsi and it dropped to the snow covered floor, its life oozing from the dozen holes that suddenly appeared in its body.

This just left Edema with the final creature, she could sense this was far more intelligent and significantly stronger than the others. Pushing off with her cybernetic leg, she vaulted backwards to give herself some space. She had only just enough time to react to the creature's attack as it sent volleys of talon-like darts flying towards her, its wing-like limbs on its back having somehow projected these lethal projectiles. The Sephi deflected most with her blades but the final few were diverted using her shield and gauntlets. The beast followed up this attack with a wave of its siren song, she could feel it punch into her skull like some kind of blissful wave of fire, she could see images of herself falling to her knees in submission, giving up her control to this creature, these images filled her head but the sqarking of Pred over her comlink snapped her out of it. She felt the creature's attempt to control her, but her mind was having none of this, she threw the creature's songs from her mind which visibly staggered the beast, clearly this was not something it expected. Taking her chance with the opportunity, the Mandalorian used it to her advantage, throwing her blades like spears towards it and stabbing their purple blades through its chest. She could see the creatures realization of what was about to happen, and she suddenly felt as if it was speaking to her through the Force, it was then the horror got even worse, these creatures had been Force sensitives, Forcefully mutated and corrupted to serve the purposes of their masters, tormented and trapped within their now monstrous bodies, the death she had delivered to the creature had set the soul within it free, but the realization of what these creatures were threatened to make the Arconan sick, throwing off her helmet she emptied the contents of her stomach onto the snow.

This information was perhaps the most valuable thing that they could have acquired from this encounter, as horrific and terrible as it was, the Consul needed to know this information. She could see Jor running towards her and could sense her concern, Edema would tell her everything once they were on the way from this awful place. The Nightfall Prism II landed and they loaded the three mostly frozen bodies onto grav carts and placed them into the cargo bay, with luck these creatures would help unlock something that would prevent this atrocity from continuing. The Sephi couldn't leave the final three bodies just as they were so with help from Jor and the droids, they doused the bodies in flammable liquid and gave them the best funeral

that they could muster in such a hellish place, Edema only hoped that their suffering would now be over and that their deaths would not be in vain.

The Sephi left the frozen wilderness and set course back to Estle, this information needed to reach the Summit as soon as possible, she only hoped that Ryhlance, Ood and the clan's other scientists would be able to make use of the bodies she was bringing back. The memory of what she had seen of the beings' torment would stay with her for a long time, and she suspected that sleep would not be easy for a while.