

“Koda!” A Zabrak woman shouted from the cockpit of a Lancer-class pursuit craft, she leaned back in the Captain's chair. “Get up here, we’ve got a job alert.” The sound of footsteps against metal approached. A tall man in Mandalorian armor ducked through the cockpit corridor.

“So let me get this straight. The only time you’ll call me Koda is when it’s professional, correct?” The red-haired man asked, “Because otherwise I’m in trouble.”

“Correct.” The bald, horned Zabrak smiled “Otherwise you will be called by my many pet names for you. Except during missions we’ll go by our codenames.”

“As you wish, Keira.” Koda smiled with a sly grin.

“That’s *Captain* to you.” Keira pointed, “Otherwise I’m going to throw you into the brig and that’s where you can sleep tonight.”

“You’re cute when you’re angry. Now pull up the job details before I spank you.” Koda got up behind her chair.

“It’s not a threat if they enjoy it, you know.” She giggled and pulled up the log. A screen appeared on the terminal next to them and started listing text.

Bastion Crew, you are the closest ship to the Shalewing Research Outpost in the Trialia system. Official contact with the outpost was lost two rotations ago. The research team was working on fungal spores in the hopes to find something valuable from it. Last week one of the scientists exposed said fungal spores on a test lifeform and reported that they ‘slowly turned

mindless and hostile, responding to all outside stimuli as a threat.' We recommend you wear protective, sealed equipment and reestablish a connection with the outpost or confirm an outbreak, in which the outpost will be quarantined and destroyed. If such an outcome is to occur, you will be required to quarantine in your ship until no symptoms appear. Successful completion of this contract will pay fifty-thousand credits.

"I'm not too keen on going somewhere that could get us sick...or turn us into feral monsters." Koda sighed "But I know we need the credits."

"The fifty-thousand would cover the repairs we need for everything. After this job we might be able to get a place somewhere and start the family we want. Away from that crazy family of yours." She teased

"They're not crazy. They're protective. Just because they stay on their base doesn't make them crazy."

"No, but it does make them closed off from the galaxy and never being able to experience anything. Life isn't worth living if you can't go out and explore and experience some danger. Living to be a hundred years old because you were safe the whole time isn't a life lived."

"I wish I was as wise as you sometimes." Koda smiled, "Even if you're just mostly a wise-ass." He chuckled, leaning down to kiss her on the lips. The two lovers exchange a quick kiss and a smile.

"Now let's go save some bored researchers, yeah?" Keira pressed a button on the side of her chair and it moved itself to the control console. "Buckle up because we're about to go to

my second favorite place, hyperspace.” Koda walked over to the co-pilot chair and strapped in. Keira entered in the coordinates and within a few moments they slipped through hyperspace and into the Trialia system, approaching the moon that held the Shaelwing Research Outpost. Keira pressed the button on the comm system, “Shaelwing, this is the Captain of the Bastion speaking. Do you copy?” The duo waits a few moments.

“I have a bad feeling about this.” Koda sighed.

“Shaelwing, do you copy? This is Captain Holliday.” Keira repeated before sighing, “Koda it seems like we’re going for a little moon walk. I don’t think our egghead friends are available to open the doors for us.”

“I’ll go get sealed up. Get us in as close as you can, please. I don’t want another leap fiasco.” Koda heads down the hallway.

“That was between a floating station and you were fine!” Keira shouted it down the hallway to him as she slowly brought the ship in to land. “This does not look good...” She says as the full station comes into view. Multiple sections of lights were out along with a large crystal formation sticking outside a far section of the base. Keira lands the ship on top of the hangar doors and gets up, grabbing her modified scout trooper helmet, with a skull painted on it, and slipping it on, “Koda, I’ll meet you in the cargo hold.” As she made it down there, Koda was attaching his Z-6 to the side of his backpack. His red and gold helmet gleaming.

“Kiki, you don’t have your helmet attached to any oxygen.” Koda said, walking over to grab his power hammer.

“I was getting to that part.” Keira went over to the spare tanks and slipped one onto her back, grabbing the tube and attaching it to her helmet with the sealing hiss.

“See anything when we landed?” Koda asked, walking over to the ramp controls.

“There’s some giant crystal formation that looks like it crashed into the base. As if it was an asteroid of some kind.” She responded

“This job gets weirder by the minute.” Koda sighed and pressed the button to seal the cargo hold. He then opened up the ramp and what oxygen was in there was sucked out into the vacuum of space. The two armored individuals made their way onto the surface of the dusty moon, their weight shifting due to not being supported by the artificial gravity. They make their way towards an outer access tunnel, flicking their helmet lights on. “Did you bring your slicing tools?” Koda asked Keira.

“No, I didn’t bring them. The station’s power is finicky, it doesn’t look like it’s making it out this far. We’re just going to have to use those big muscles of yours.”

“It’ll mostly be the hammer doing the job, Kiki.” He lifts his hammer up.

“Captain.” She points at him, sounding grumpy.

“Right, Captain. Even though there is no one around.” Koda chuckled. The two of them approach the access door, Koda brings the hammer back and quickly swings it into the door, sending a shockwave through it that breaks the seal on it, dust flying out from the escaping air. “This will take a few swings.” He strikes the door a half dozen more times before it comes off the

hinges, slowly falling forward into the moon dust. The two look into the small building, where there is a body lying right at the door. "Great..." Koda sighed, using his boot to push the body out of the way. The corpse looked as if they had their eyes gouged out, causing Keira to hop backwards, spooked.

"I really don't like this. This is creepy..." Keira said, pulling her blaster out of her holster.

"I'll take the lead then. We're going to figure out what happened. Then we make sure this place is marked for destruction." Koda stepped into the building and he turned left into a long corridor to the interior of the base. Keira keeps close behind him, her blaster at the ready. The two of them make it to the entrance to the base. "Looks like it has power." Koda pressed the airlock button and a door behind them closed the tunnel off and started to fill the airlock with air. Within a few moments the doors to the base opened. All around the emergency red lights were blaring. "Best case scenario, that crystal asteroid did a lot of damage. Worst case...we have infected humanoids." Koda sighed "This is why we wear armor."

"And it's also why you are the bright target." Keira made a nervous sounding joke "I'm shooting anything that looks dangerous."

"As long as you don't shoot me." Koda chuckled as the two searched the area. They appeared to be in a main meeting hub, all leading up to a big corridor that led into the side of the moon. Right at the entrance to the corridor was another body. Koda approached it and looked them over. Their entire body was encrusted with crystals and their mouth and eyes were caked with blood. "Alright...we're only looking a little deeper before we're getting the hell out of here. Mercenaries, pirates, and any other sentients I can handle without fear. But this...this doesn't feel right at all." The two continued down the hallway, Keira covering their back side. They reach

the end of the hallway and the large door opens up, with a large gust of wind that causes Keira to fall over and be pulled along with, letting off a scream. Luckily for her, a railing stopped her from being sucked down the giant pit in front of them. For at least a few hundred feet down was a deep pit, with some kind of full research lab at the bottom, overlooking what appeared to be an arena. A walkway spiraled its way down to the bottom, with labs placed evenly along the pathway down. Looking up would show the butt end of the giant crystal, still managing to keep the station sealed.

“Dank farrik...” Groaned as Koda helped her up. She looked around along with him, “I really don’t like this place.”

“If there’s anyone here left alive, I’m sure they’re more afraid of us than we can be of them. Anything hurting?” Koda looked his fiance over and brushed some dust off of her.

“Yeah everything is fine. Thankfully it was my back.” She groaned and stretched her shoulder.

“Thankfully? That’s the part that could break easily.”

“Yeah but I don’t want to...damage my organs.” She paused for just a moment, “Throwing up in a helmet isn’t fun.”

“I suppose. Let’s get a move on, shall we? I want to get back on the ship, and get an easy paycheck. Then we can finally take that vacation.”

“Promise? Beaches, drinks, and relaxing?” Keira asked, sounding like she’s relaxing more, “Oh how I would prefer that so much more than this. Or a hot bubble bath.”

“If we had a luxury ship, I would want a tub we both could fit in, or at least one I can sit in without having my legs sticking out.” The two kept their minds of the eerie situation they were in as they made their way down the spiral. As they passed the laboratories, they weren’t able to get a good look inside, for the windows were opaque. “It seems odd that they would put all this effort in for some fungal research facility.”

“Maybe there’s something deeper to it. The report said they were testing it on animals. Maybe they needed the space for it. Like a giant zoo.” Keira theorized.

“All that effort? For spores? I don’t know. That doesn’t seem likely.”

“Wanna make a bet on it? If I’m right, you have to do everything I ask for the rest of the week.” Keira giggled

“And if I win?” Koda asked

“I will cook you your favorite meals.” She responded

“You do that anyways.”

“Yeah, but this time I will make them with extra care and with whatever else you want with them.”

“Sounds like a bad bet, but I accept these terms.” Koda chuckled. As they got further down the spiral, one of the doors to a lab was broken out from the inside. The two slowed down as Koda readied his power hammer, creeping towards the door and poking his head around it. The inside of the lab was completely destroyed, broken glass and equipment everywhere, shattered tables and counters, droids that looked ripped apart, and a few limbs lying about that were both humanoids and animals. “I think we found where this all started. Let’s keep heading down. Hopefully there’s a terminal down there we can get some information off of.”

“I’m so glad I have a filter for my helmet. I bet the smell here is atrocious...” Keira groaned.

“We’ve been in worse. Remember Nal Hutta?” Koda chuckled

“Oh gross...don’t remind me. I was still smelling that place for a month after we left. No matter how much soap we used.” She cringed “Geuch....even thinking about the smell makes me gag.”

“Not the only thing that makes you gag~” Koda laughed

“Oh shut up.” Keira laughed with him. The two made their way down to the base of the pit, where there were dissected corpses of different animals on tables. Precise and delicately handled, unlike the bodies of scientists and crystal infused humanoids that lingered about the lab area. The platform they were on overlooked the large arena-like ditch, with animal skeletons stacked along the sides. On the north side was a humongous set of doors, one that would make a Gorax look short.

“What in the blazes are they keeping down here?” Koda asked as he looked at the door. Keira approached a large monitor and started to fiddle with the controls. Within a few moments she got a screen of text to appear and pressed the play button for the audio.

“Come check this out.” She turned to Koda, before looking back at the screen. Koda walked over and the two began to listen.

“Doctor Tarin’s Log: 213. Our final test subject has been successful. Our modifications and splicing of the fungal spores have allowed us to successfully control the animalistic state of those afflicted. Keeping Gorgantua satiated has been the biggest problem. So far it has only responded well enough to infected individuals or materials. One of our feeders was...tragically lost due to spore residue on their suit. Our safety parameters have been in place to keep Gorgantua contained. The charged fence is to remain on and armed guards are to be constantly watching it. The failure to do so would destroy this whole base. My next test was to begin within the hour, but we had a red alert of a large foreign object headed our way. So we are to take shelter before it arrives. Hopefully it will pass withou-” The red alert alarm blares over the audio “I’ll have to finish it here.” The doctor sighed “end log.”

“Gorgantua? What kind of name is that?” Keira asked the computer, as if it would give her an answer.

“I don’t know. But if it’s contained behind that.” Koda pointed to the massive doors, “I don’t want to find out.”

“We found out what we needed to, damn mad scientists. Let’s get out of here. Shall we?” Koda asked her.

“Yeah. Let’s get the hell out of here.” She said, turning to walk towards the ramp and tripping, falling onto the console. This caused sirens to blare.

“Attention. Full vacuum release initiated. Please evacuate the immediate area, the doors will be closing in sixty seconds.

“RUN!” Koda shouted. The two of them started to book it up the ramp. As they’re making their way up, a large set of claws reached through the slowly opening doors that were holding Gorgantua in. The massive beast ripped the doors off its hinges and its attention immediately went to the duo. As they ran up the ramp, the creature started to reach up and scale with them, tearing the ramp down as it went.

“What the hell is that thing?!” Keira shouted

“Let’s not find out! We need to go faster!” Koda shouted, looking behind to make sure Keira was close behind him.

“Thirty seconds until ventilation.” The announcement rang. Gorgantua roared loudly as it climbed after the duo, shaking the whole building and causing them to stagger as they ran, falling to their knees. Koda helped Keira up and they continued on running, adrenaline carrying them as fast as their bodies could go.

“Ten seconds.” The duo was on the final spiral, and the door to the exit was in sight. Koda seemed to have a second wind and charged at the door.

“Three.” The base announced

Koda reaches across the threshold with his left arm, reaching out for Keira's extended arm, the right arm of the beast grabbing onto the platform behind her.

"Two."

Their fingertips brushed past each other, both forming their palms to grab each other's forearms.

"One."

Everything was in slow motion for him. His hand grasped her forearm as he started to pull her through. But he was too late. The door quickly slid closed. He didn't even feel the pain as his arm was sliced off in front of him by the door. His ears started to ring and the world started to spin. His fiance's hand slipped off what remained of his lower arm, clattering to the floor. The last thing he heard before everything went black was.

"KODAAAAA-!" Keira's final scream. Her final plea.

He was only out cold for a few seconds and it all felt like a dream to him. Keira's final words echoing in his head. In his dazed state he sat up, a small pool of blood. Koda used his right arm to feel around his utility belt for a bacta kit. Quickly applying it to the stump. Everything he did was on instinct. He looked down at Keira's hand and picked it up, bringing it to his chest and holding on tightly as he silently cried before sobbing hard. This was his fault. If only he had been a moment sooner he would have saved her. But now she's gone, and this base is going to be destroyed, destroying what left of here there might be. His focus shifted in and out, black out as he made his way back to the ship, the bacta patch barely sealing the left side of his torn suit. All he remembers is taking the ship to orbit and blankly staring at the station with the beast that killed his Kiki, floating above it. Within the hour, he watched the base get bombarded by those who hired them. By those who caused this all to happen. By those he would seek the first step of revenge against.