***A Date With Destiny***

By Adept Thran Occasus-Palpatine

The air was full of stinging grains of sand, whipped up into a frenzied cloud by thrusters of the departing freighter. Rayne pulled her cloak up to her face, which provided only a modicum of shelter from the abrasive fog. Visibility was low, maybe two or three meters at most. Beyond that short range, the air was blanketed with ruddy brown dust.

“This way,” Thran’s voice echoed just over her left shoulder.

She turned to follow him. This was the first time they had taken on a mission together in a great many years. The excitement of what may be ahead of them bounced around in her mind like an excited paddy frog. Rather expectedly, he hadn’t given her many details before they left Seraph. Yet, the manner of their departure told her enough. The battered old Corellian ship they had boarded was not an Imperial Transport, which meant that this expedition was personal in nature. Their journey to this barren world had been mostly quiet, aside from a few informal nights of Sabacc with the Captain and First Mate of the transport Thran had hired. She was surprised that Thran was so welcoming of the piscine First Mate, called Quish.

The Firrerreon was used to Thran’s masterful misdirects and veiled intentions, but this time she could sense something was different, the withholding of information was not intentional; Thran didn’t have more information. He was being pulled by the Force, drawn to a point in space as if by a powerful spiritual magnet. She could feel it too, tugging on her. It began like whispers in the darkness and grew in volume until its call was unavoidable. Whatever its origin, it beckoned to them.

Their bond was growing deeper by the day. Gone were the days where they would stare at each other longingly across the room at the Sunset Cantina. They had finally let themselves free and let passion fill the night. The result was something more than either had anticipated. Rayne felt as though they had become two souls that shared one destiny. She could anticipate his words before he spoke them, predict his actions as if they were her own, and feel with the same depth of experience the thoughts and emotions boiling deep within the core of his being. Rayne suspected that it was this bond which had opened her senses to the calling whispers.

“To the left, handsome,” She called out, as she guided him from a step behind.

“Yes, I can feel it,” Thran replied.

They had moved nearly one hundred meters from where they had leapt from the transport and the air was beginning to clear. She looked back above the landing zone and caught the white-blue band of engines on the fleeing transport. The fact that the two “enterprising small businessmen” didn’t remain on station until the had completed whatever it was that they had come to do alarmed her. This place was dangerous, she knew that much.

When Rayne turned back, she was able to see the landscape around her. They were in the middle of a narrow canyon. Towering deep orange sandstone cliffs surrounded them. Tall jagged columns of red crystalline stone stabbed forth from the ground, extending twenty to forty meters into the sky above the floor of the gorge. The massive daggers of stone had been revealed by eons of weathering from abrasive sand. This was an ancient place, but something about it felt so familiar. It was like she had been here before, but in a memory or a dream.

Thran laid his hand on the sharp stone. His sharp green eyes were such a contrast to this place, they seemed to shine twice as bright as normal. He closed his eyes and Rayne could instantly feel the path drawn out before her, siphoned directly from her lover’s vision. At the end of the illuminated path, deep within a cavern, upon a raised pedestal, sat a dusty old vault. Rayne could see it as clearly as if it were just in front of her now.

“That’s it.” She half whispered.

“Yes.” Thran affirmed.

They wasted no time and began to move. She followed him towards a deep and jagged crevasse. She held him by the wrist and lowered him down into the crack. Thran climbed down several feet and she followed behind him. As Rayne reached the bottom, she could feel his strong hands against the small her back. She steadied herself for a moment, soaking in the tenderness of their proximity.

“Thank you.” She said

“The pleasure was all mine, I assure you.” He smirked.

“We had better move. I sense...” she began.

“Someone is coming.” He added.

“Yes...They are...Jedi.” she snarled, revealing a pair of pronounced canine teeth.

“Zealots. Last time they sent two. They were wise to send more, but foolish to not send enough. Come. We will wait for them. They will only be expecting me. Remain hidden. You will know when to appear.” He said and turned to delve deeper into the cave.

The tips of her fingers lingered on his skin for a fraction of a moment before she released. They dipped under hanging rocks, careful not to scrape themselves on the sharp stone edges. The crawled and climbed, following the call deep within their hearts. In a short time, they arrived at the location they had seen in their mind’s eye.

The cavern was damp. The echo of dropping water filled the small chamber. The floor of the room was flooded with several centimeters of mineralized water. It smelled of iron and salt, with the putridity of stale blood. At the center of the room, a fluted pedestal rose from the shallow puddle. Atop it, an ornately carved chest begged to be opened.

She could hear it calling to her. What was once intelligible whispers felt like clearly spoken instructions. Twisted dark tendrils of the Force embraced her mind. Suddenly their purpose in this place all made sense. Glaring upon the casket, Rayne was taken away by a vision. She saw another world, viewed as if she were there herself and seeing it with her own eyes. She could feel the muck of a swamp world cling to her skin and feel the coldness of stone on her fingers. Her eyes filled with the shine of gold as she reached into a similar casket. She could feel the angular shape of a Sith Wayfinder at her fingers.

Her vision flashed. She gripped tight on a blazing orange lightsaber. She saw the terror in the eyes of a hulking burnt umber skinned mammalian Jedi as the last glimmer of life left. The agonized screams of that Master’s padawan filled her ears. Then, the cold drops of rain and the freedom of the Dark Side kissed her skin. She knew this memory was not her own, but she felt as though it was.

 *<<Free me.>>* The whisper filled her ears. She turned to look at Thran.

Thran motioned to Rayne. She nodded and scarpered up into a shadowed recess in the rock. She watched him, like a keen-eyed bird of prey. She waited, patiently, for the right moment to strike. Thran stepped up to the chest. He waited. He stood there, like a statue, waiting for their victims.

It didn’t take long for them to show up. Five lightsaber blades illuminated the dark chamber. Shades of green, blue and yellow cast shadows over the room. Then, and only then, could Rayne see the walls of the chamber. Etched into the stone were long straight runes. She couldn’t read them, but recognized them as the language of the Ancient Sith.

“You shall be cleansed, Aberrant!” one of the Jedi called out, raising his lightsaber to an attack position.

Thran didn’t turn to face them. A sinister laughter left his lips and filled the room. The Jedi flinched.

“Have you come for vengeance, Master Jedi?” Thran hissed.

“Silence, Sith. You will pay for your heresy.” The leader of the Jedi replied.

“Are you certain you’ve brought enough bodies to collect that debt?” Thran replied.

“You are outnumbered, Aberrant. You will be cleansed today.” The Jedi replied.

Thran finally turned to face the enemy. His lightsaber manifested into his hand, roaring to life as he fingered the ignition. Rayne let go her grip on the stones. Aided by the unnatural strength of the Dark Side, she propelled herself off the wall. Tumbling head over heel, she landed with feline grace at his side. Her lightsaber snapped to life, revealing a deep red blade.

“THERE ARE TWO OF THEM!” A Jedi called from the rear guard.

Thran snapped into motion. His lightsaber slipped left and right, catching one of the ill prepared Jedi about the torso. Their lifeless body collapsed into the shallow pool at their feet.

Rayne, too, leapt into motion. She cast her hands forward, projecting a spray of the salty mineral water at their quarry. Yelps came forward from their mouths as the stinging liquid filled their eyes. Her reverse grip slash cleft another of the Jedi in two. Rayne turned back to Thran. Her hand shot forward again, pulling one of the Jedi directly at Thran’s waiting blade. He sliced the unwitting victim from groin to crown, leaving two masses of lifeless flesh to crash into the pool below.

Intoxicated by the thrill of battle, Rayne leapt again. She somersaulted through the air, landing directly behind another of the Jedi. She thrusted deliberately. Her blade found purchase and ran through the guardian’s chest. She savored the sound of the last gasp of air leaving the Jedi’s lungs.

Thran raised his hand, clutching a fist. A cracking pop of broken bone filled the cavern. A single splash ended the engagement. The Jedi had vastly underestimated what trained Sith were capable of. The room fell silent again.

Rayne delicately stepped over the remains of their victims and came to Thran’s side. They stepped up to the pedestal together. Thran tilted back the lid. They peered inside.

“Oooh, shiny.” Rayne said, lifting the contents from the box.

Two ornate rings, made of thin wire of silvery metal and set with a single inky black stone, rested on a small stone slab. Rayne’s keen eye looked closely at the jewelry.

“Try it on.” Thran said as he reached for the larger of the two rings.

They slipped the rings onto their middle fingers. The rings seemed tailor made for them. They fit perfectly.

“I love it.” Rayne held up her hand up to examine the ring.

“We should get out on dates like this more often.” Thran grinned.

“Yes. You know the way to my heart. Killing Jedi in a weird cave is certainly romantic.” Rayne laughed.

“Come on, let’s get out of here.” Thran said. He hung an arm over her shoulder and they made their way out of the cave.

There would be time later to uncover the mysteries of why they had been called to this place, but this place lacked the comfort of home. As they made their way back to the tunnel, Thran paused.

“Wait a second.” He said, closing his eyes.

The lightsabers of the felled Jedi rose from the water. Held aloft in the air, the weapons drifted over to them. Thran gathered the weapons and stored them in a pouch at his hip.

“We almost forgot our souvenirs.” Thran said with a smile. “Let’s go home.”