

Chronicles of Mardoun

Chapter 15 - NKG0056

“We were told nursery rhymes about monsters kept locked away deep inside The Temple. Does anyone still believe those old stories ?” – Estrid

Kittara had worried Sventa might try to enter the Temple of the Flame, but the Genova knew well what was imprisoned there and she was terrified of the place. As she came out of her trance Kittara noticed two very sleepy looking young clerics were in the chamber of The Flame with her.

“For you.” One said pointing at some flowers on the floor.

“Thank you.”

Well, well she thought as she picked up the flowers, I must give them a pep talk more often. She tightened the straps on the sword on her back, and adjusted her boots and she was ready for the mission. She moved her reality to her garden and found Estrid ready to leave, and Sventa being difficult.

“Nice flowers.” Said Estrid.

“From the clerics, I think there might be hope for them yet.”

She noticed Sventa was still in just her plain robe.

“You’re not dressed in armour yet ?”

“I don’t want to, it feels uncomfortable and stops me moving quickly.”

Kittara had heard the same story before from warriors new to wearing body armour and of course the first time it saved their lives, they became converts.

“We don’t have time for this, wear it, it can stop a blaster shot.”

“I’m tougher than I look.”

Kittara’s hand shimmered and she was holding a standard issue Ixir blaster, which she fired at a large palm in her garden. The plant seemed to melt where the blaster hit and then collapsed into her pool.

“Now wear the armour !”

Sventa raised her right talon and pointed it at a bulbous green plant at the other end of the garden. As her whole arm glowed the plant instantly turned to ash that floated off with the gentle morning breeze.

“No,” said Sventa, “I can look after myself !”

“Ok, we need to leave, just stay out of the way in any fire fights.”

Kittara looked them over and Estrid had her shield on, her usual cut down Guard uniform and her bag of tricks on the floor next to her, plus of course her own Yakkie.

As to Sventa ? She looked ready for a morning on the sofa, but they had to go.

“Ready ?”

Estrid picked up her things and nodded, while Sventa adjusted the belt on her gown. The control room of the Old One was overlaid onto the garden and as it became clearer they stepped forward and onto the ancient craft.

“Good morning Kittara, a pleasure to have you on board.” Said the Old One.

“Morning, how long until the fun starts ?”

“About 15 minutes. I saved you a seat at the front.”

Kittara liked the new confident Old One, and even his new Ixir newspeak was better than his old depressed persona. As the others settled down to wait, Kittara noticed Ojetin was concentrating on probes of the mining settlement. She walked behind him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Anything going on down there?" She asked.

He looked around at her and gave her a huge grin.

"I'm glad you're here. They know something is coming. The last few hours have seen frantic activity and the miners are all carrying blasters."

Alyz walked over and had a look at the probe of the mine.

"They even seem to be laying some traps in the mines." She said.

"Any signs of the New Keo fleet heading this way?" Asked Kittara.

"Chlo says not. It looks like just the locals down there getting restless." Said Ojetin.

Kittara felt for the link with Chlo, and she confirmed there had been no communications between the miners and New Keo fleet for weeks, but something didn't make sense.

"Old One, when we go in I want you to hit the atmosphere as hard as you dare." She said.

Let's go in with a bit of shock and awe she thought.

"Understood."

The Old One didn't mention it meant changing the orders he'd had from Qunan. He didn't much like the rebel commander, but Kittara he wanted on his side.

"Shall we go and find Princess?" Kittara asked Estrid.

"Yes, I haven't seen her for ages."

Kittara looked around to ask Sventa, but she was talking to Alyz as though they'd been friends for years. Probably for the best she thought. Sventa's red hair was re-growing well and was now a good inch long on most of her head, but with the wings she was still likely to startle the crew. Kittara held onto Estrid and moved them both into the crew's quarters.

"Chlo warned me you were heading this way." Said Princess.

Estrid ran to her for a hug as Kittara looked around the room.

"Not bad, plenty of space, your own bathroom." Said Kittara.

"Yes, it's an old colonist's ship and there are enough rooms for everyone. Getting it fixed in the hold was a nightmare, but it means a bit of comfort. I even get the Ixir news."

Princess continued putting on her boots and armour while the other two looked around her temporary home from home.

"So you went with the name Xeodz?" Asked Kittara.

"Yes. I know you said baiting even a dead demon was unwise, but I just love the name."

"Where is Albas?" Asked Estrid.

"He's on Ixir finishing the place off for the opening night."

"Can I come?"

Princess looked uncomfortable.

"Oh come on," said Kittara, "she went there when it was Jinxies and probably caused most of it to burn down. Twelve or not I think she'll survive the opening night."

They all laughed and Princess hugged Estrid.

"Ok, you can come to the opening, but no hard liquor."

The screen on the wall flashed and several rows of numbers started counting down.

"We seem ahead of schedule." Said Princess.

"That might be my fault." Said Kittara.

Estrid was watching the various coloured rows of numbers.

"We're yellow group," said Princess, "we don't go out until we've been on the ground for thirty minutes."

"Come on Estrid, we should get back to the control room."

As she held Estrid, Kittara looked at Princess.

"Get your people ready to go early. I have a bad feeling that you might be needed ahead of schedule."

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The Old One was finally getting to the part he'd been looking forward to for months and it was going to be far more fun than Qunan's plan. The original plan was to slow right down and enter the atmosphere at a nice sedate speed, do a long slow turn and come up to the settlement at two thousand feet. Now he changed the attitude of the craft slightly and prepared to hit the atmosphere without slowing down at all. Chlo had calculated the impact at 40,000 miles an hour was within its design tolerances, so he was going for it.

"Inertial dampers to full." Said Chlo

Every warning light in the control room, and thanks to the recent modifications there were a lot of them, started to pulse.

"Fuck !" Said Alyz.

As the ship hit the atmosphere every screen became just a picture of white heat, as the outside temperature went up to the same as the surface of the local sun. The dampers did a good job and all they felt in the control room was a slight vibration.

"Commencing missile launch." Said the Old One.

The ionisation around the craft must have made them look like a meteor was coming down to the inhabitants of the settlement, but with Chlo's probes he was able to see through it and target the missiles to pinpoint accuracy. The first dozen he sent off to various points around the mine and the settlement to get the locals to keep their heads down. The second dozen were fired to hit the small landing area where any military shuttles might try and land and the comms centre to the north of Boomers. Nothing too close to the settlement, but timed to arrive just before they landed, so hopefully no one would be out in the open and firing at them.

"There's more down there than a few local miners." Said Alyz.

Her screen showed heavy energy weapons being fired from the ground. They couldn't see the Old One through all the ionisation, and their fire was going miles off target.

"I knew it," said Kittara as she arrived, "there are heavily armed troops down there."

She picked up one of the communications helmets all of the soldiers were wearing and approached Ojetin.

"We need to get one of these on you, so that you can communicate with Chlo, and a set of armour."

"We're still going ?" Asked the cleric.

"Yes we are, and probably far sooner than expected."

As she fitted the helmet to Ojetin, she noticed Sventa starting to fade away.

"It's ok Sventa, I won't put one on you."

Alyz came over and fitted a helmet to Estrid and made sure it was working. The craft started to vibrate more in the increased turbulence in the thicker upper atmosphere.

"That seems ok," said Kittara as she fastened the last strap on Ojetin's armour, "now we need to get to the main bay."

Kittara took Estrid and Ojetin to the main bay and it was full of worried, but determined looking faces. The turbulence felt worse here and the lighting was flashing, which gave the impression of being in a plummeting elevator, and in many ways that is what it was. There were a few gasps as Sventa appeared through the wall, but no one panicked. Princess was checking over the last few of her people and they looked ready to go, but were keeping back from Qunan and the main group. Kittara made her way over to Arje, who was standing by the main bay door.

"You don't need to ask, we're still going." Said Arje

Kittara was pleased to see he had a gleam in his eye. Of all the people in the bay he was probably the only one pleased that they were likely to be out gunned and outnumbered.

"Do enough damage and they might call for help." She replied to him.

Then the missiles fired by the Old One hit the ground below them and despite the inertial damping the craft was buffeted about, so that they had to hold onto one another.

"Doors open in one minute." Chlo told them.

Then came the news they all guessed was coming, but were dreading. Chlo informed them.

"Enforcer craft has just come out of light speed and will be here in fifteen minutes. Two other Enforcer class vessels en route and will be here in two hours."

So they had their deadline. If they weren't finished and one their way back home in under two hours they probably never would be. Kittara approached Salomé.

"We need the Raptor up in the air really quickly, can you support Baby?"

"Yes. Three Enforcer craft though, they knew we were coming didn't they?"

"It looks like they thought someone would come, but not exactly when. Luckily their faster than light drives are pretty crude and need a lot of programming, so we have two hours until the main fleet arrives."

The lighting started to dim as Chlo told them.

"Ten seconds to doors open."

There was a jolt as the craft landed and they could hear the heavy blasters start firing as the Old One punished any enemy who dared to approach too close. Then the doors opened and Qunan walked out into the night followed by his team.

"Good luck." Shouted Kittara.

Arje simply waved his hand at her without looking back.

"When do we go?" Asked Estrid.

"When everyone else has reached where they're going. Probably in 20 minutes or so."

Then the huge Oddr went out of the door with his group to attack the settlement, closely followed by Baby and Salomé as they headed in the direction of the container storage area.

"So just us to go." Said Princess.

She brought her party of Ixir warriors up to the door and waited for the signal to move off. From outside they heard the sound of a Yakkie firing and a cry. Kittara watched as Sveta walked through the bay wall and headed almost invisibly into the battle.

"Will she be ok on her own?" Asked Estrid.

"Yes, she'll be fine."

Kittara thought the people of this dusty rock might long remember the night a seriously annoyed dark angel arrived. She also recalled a conversation she'd had with Sveta a few days earlier.

"If you get hungry, remember, only the enemy troops, understood?"

They stood mostly in awkward silence as Chlo told them Arje and his team had met far less resistance than they thought and they were heading into the mine. In contrast Oddr had come against a full squad of battle hardened troops at the settlement and was having real problems.

"Now it's our turn." Said Princess.

Yakkie held ready she walked towards the mine with her Ixir troops behind her, and Ojetin and Estrid tucked in amongst them. Kittara was alone in the bay and wished she could go with them, but she knew that one hint of the Guard attacking a member planet and the whole Empire could disintegrate into warring factions. So she waited.

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Salomé was helping Nauma open one of the containers, while Baby could be heard breaking the locks on the other one. The journey to the containers had been uneventful, but two New Keo troopers had been waiting there and opened up on them as they arrived. One of Salomé's men had died instantly and it could have been worse, but a huge winged creature appeared out of the black sky and tore them to pieces. Baby almost opened fire on it, but Salomé held her back.

"It's Sventa."

There were unsettling cracking sounds in the dark and then all was quiet.

"Thank the Temple she's on our side." Said Baby.

Nauma broke the last chain and opened the service hatch on the container and jumped back.

There was a loud grinding sound as the sides of the container folded down and inspection lights came on. Salomé suddenly felt very exposed, and sent her small team off to defend the area as best they could.

"Is that it?" Said Nauma.

Inside the massive container was what looked like a huge weapons pod of some kind that filled two thirds of the space.

"Stay here, I'll check on Baby." Said Salomé.

As she reached her Baby was activating the other container and it was opening up and inspection lights were coming on inside.

"How did they get that here?" Said Salomé.

In front of her was an old model Imperial raptor craft and it looked what it was, eighty feet of shiny black lethality. Salomé heard one of her people fire, and saw a shape collapse that was hard to distinguish in the dark. Then there was the sound of wings behind her and then screaming. Salomé had seen a lot of wars, but this was starting to get to her. Baby was caressing the raptor and giving it a look of love.

"Heavy, fast, difficult to knock out of the sky." She said.

"Ok," said Salomé, "but we're lit up like a casino here, get it into the air so we can help at the settlement."

No one had ever called Baby bright, but she knew how to fly just about anything and she loved raptors. She clambered up the side footholds and released the catches to open the cockpit.

"Oh goody, more fucking light." Said Salomé.

The cockpit lit up and there was that reassuring high tech whine as the engines came to life. As Baby climbed into the cockpit, Salomé thought she saw movement and went into a crouch. The odd thing was that the New Keo trooper seemed to be running away from something and paying no attention to her. Then as he turned and instinctively put his hand up to defend himself, Sventa was on him and had him covered by her wings. Sventa pushed his dead body to the ground and folded her wings back, and Salomé watched in stunned silence as the dark angel used her talons to dig out one of his internal organs. His liver? Thought Salomé.

Sventa took a bite and then looked at her, so she waved at her. It felt an absurd thing to do, but Sventa waved back and then she picked up the rest of the liver and hurtled straight up into the sky.

"Fuck me." She said.

"What?" Said Nauma over their link.

"Nothing, just check your targets carefully, Sventa is thinning the enemy out for us."

Baby settled herself in the cockpit and felt comfortable as she turned on the various instruments. In most one person fighters she felt cramped, but in this she had room for her legs and her elbows. Everything checked out at 100%. This was a very old design, but someone had obviously made sure all the systems were working perfectly, but it was no use without the pod. Baby ever so gently took the raptor up just high enough to clear the container and took it back in reverse over the top of the pod in the other container. As she did so blaster fire raked over the back of her craft. The raptor was in no danger, but she was happy to see the fire returned by the Yakkies of her team. She lowered the craft over the pod and aligned the pod with its connectors and saw the green lights come on when it was secured.

"Why aren't you gone yet?" She heard Salomé say.

"Got full power now, just heading off."

There was a gentle hum as she turned on the inertial damping and took the craft slowly up into the sky. She knew the pod was the key to the power of the craft and its inertial damping, but not being a techie she had no idea why. She did know the pod was incredibly heavy though, and weighed more than an Imperial shuttle all on its own.

"On my way." She said.

As she accelerated hard towards where the Enforcer craft was due to appear, she wondered how anyone had managed to get the two very heavy containers onto this dung heap of a planet? In fact it was due to the expertise of the now late Carl Laudry and the Foundation. NKG0056 was in the middle of nowhere, with little restriction on what went there, or was taken away. This meant it was a haven for contraband and for a small settlement they had a huge container storage area. The locals got a payment to look the other way and not ask questions and the Foundation got a safe place away from prying eyes to store just about anything it wanted. On this occasion the locals got a bit more than they bargained for.

"What was that?" Nauma asked.

In the direction of the Old One they could see the sky light up as a constant stream of heavy energy weapon beams tore down from the sky above.

"I think the Enforcer craft just arrived. Come on lets get to the settlement." Said Salomé.

As Salomé collected her people together Chlo contacted her.

"Qunan seems to have run into trouble and I can't raise his team, can you go and investigate?" Salomé just hoped Qunan hadn't done another of his futile gestures as she took her team towards the mine.

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Hol had come on board and sat opposite Alyz, and neither of them could do a thing. The Old One had enough of The Damned on board to take over a planet, yet they were all sat on their hands. The plasma bolts coming from the Enforcer craft must have looked horrific from outside the craft, as they slammed into the defensive shields at a rate of two a second, but inside the control room they felt nothing.

"No deterioration of the shields at all." Said the Old One.

Blue jets sped skyward from his own six plasma cannons as he returned their fire.

Kittara had stayed in the bay in case any returning soldiers needed healing, and there were at least another fifteen of the Guard dotted around the huge craft, all hoping that the New Keo Group might ask the Empire for help.

"In this war of attrition, we will win." Said Chlo.

Alyz looked at the screen and saw that the Enforcer craft was due to run out of enough energy to maintain its shields in about eleven hours.

"By then half the New Keo fleet will be here Chlo."

Hol saw Baby starting her first attack run in the raptor and it looked like a bug attacking a Jangar.

"Can she hurt them Chlo?" Asked Hol.

"The Raptor was intended to be used against small fighter craft or ground forces. I doubt they'll be able to bring her down, but the damage she can do to them is minimal."

Hol watched as Baby went the entire length of the Enforcer craft, peppering it with her twin heavy blasters as she went, all with seemingly no effect.

"She might reduce their shield life by a few minutes." Said Chlo.

Hol pulled the specs for the Enforcer craft off the common channel and in Imperial terms it wasn't very impressive and an Imperial attack wing could reduce it to a wisp of super heated plasma in seconds. To the resources they had to hand though, it was a headache. A quarter of a

mile long, with two external armour shells around a toughened inner hull, it was a tough nut to crack. An old design fusion reactor provided the energy for eight fairly inefficient plasma cannons and the shields.

"They're launching two fighters." Said Alyz.

Hol watched as two dots appeared on the screen and quickly accelerated towards them. Then the Old One shook slightly and two thin beams engulfed the enemy fighters. The beams formed a tear drop shape that ate into the crafts shields and within a few seconds all that was left of the fighters was a cloud of ionised particles.

"How did you do that?" Asked Hol

There was no mistaking it, the Old One really was chuckling.

"A little gift Sikush gave me. No use against the Enforcer, but they won't get any fighters into the sky."

"Will it take out a shuttle?" Asked Alyz.

"Looks like they're trying to reinforce their ground troops." Said Hol.

The large centre bay doors on the Enforcer had opened and a shuttle craft was emerging.

"How many troopers will that carry Chlo?" Asked Hol.

"About two hundred. Baby is coming around to attack them."

As they watched the Raptor swung around the back of the Enforcer and gave a long sustained burst of fire at the shuttle.

"She knows how to fly," said the Old One, "but she hasn't even slowed them down."

Then the Old One shook again and two thin beams of crackling blue energy hit the shuttle and engulfed it. The weapon didn't totally destroy the shuttle, but all that was left of it were a few fragments of wreckage that carried on falling towards the atmosphere.

"At least we can stop them getting more men down here." Said Alyz.

"We don't have eleven hours though," said Hol, "can you tell Princess to hurry Chlo?"

"NO," cut in Kittara, "they know what they're doing, leave them to get on with it."

Then they all turned and watched the screens as Baby said.

"I've just had an idea."

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Salomé arrived at the mine entrance and there were bodies everywhere. Qunan had said there was little resistance, yet she could see at least seven dead New Keo troopers and two of Qunan's team lying on the ground.

"Qunan, are you there Qunan?"

"Chlo can you raise them?"

"Sorry Salomé, still nothing from any of his team."

It didn't make sense. He'd gone in there with eleven men and the augment Hogni, and one of them must still be alive. It was the first chance she'd had to look at the enemy, so she examined the closest dead New Keo trooper.

"This one doesn't have armour." Said Nauma, who was examining another body.

"Same with this one," said Salomé, "and the blaster is old and worn."

Salomé led her team into the mine and was instantly faced with a choice of six possible tunnels to follow, but she remembered from the briefings that the green line on the wall would lead to the ruins.

"Follow the green lines, always follow green." She told her team.

The lighting on the route they were following was quite good, but every fifty yards or so other tunnels would be on either side of them, often with little lighting. From one side tunnel they heard shouting and then a scream, but they didn't have time to investigate.

"More bodies." Said Nauma, pointing ahead.

They found an electric vehicle with a heavy blaster attached and five dead enemy troopers lying around it and in the middle of them, the body of Hogni.

"He put up quite a fight by the look of it." Said Nauma.

The body of the huge augment was covered in blaster burns and one leg was shattered below the knee, yet it was obvious he had carried on firing his Yakkie until he died.

"These guys have better weapons." One of her team remarked.

They moved on down the tunnel to another intersection and Salomé should have died. One New Keo trooper emerged from a darkened tunnel and instantly killed three of her team with a sweep of his blaster. A second trooper came out of a tunnel behind Salomé and aimed his weapon at the back of her head.

"No ! It's the demon again !" Said the first trooper looking over Salomé's shoulder.

Nauma vaporised the man's head with her Yakkie and then they all turned to see the commotion behind Salomé. Sveta appeared out of the tunnel with the trooper dangling off one of her talons while she took his weapon off him with the other.

"I thought you might want this one alive." She said.

"Thank you." Said Salomé.

Sveta pushed the man to the ground and began pulling at his clothing and for an awful moment Salomé thought she might be going to eat him in front of her team.

"They have no communications," said Sveta, "they all just seem to wander around the mine attacking anyone they see."

"What are your orders ?" Nauma asked the man.

The trooper just kept staring at Sveta and was obviously terrified of her, so she prodded him with a talon and repeated the question. After a few prods from Sveta the trooper was quite happy to tell them he was just a weekend soldier, assigned to the mine on the chance that someone might attack it. Then a few days ago they were told to go into the mine and kill anyone who tried to get to the ruins. With little food or water, the troopers were now ready to kill anyone they came across, friend or foe.

"Ask him about the better armed troops ?" Asked Salomé.

Again more prodding and threats and he revealed that there were only about ten full time troopers on the planet and about a hundred weekend warriors. The trooper had no idea about any traps they might find, or the location of any other troops, so then came the question of how to deal with him, which Sveta answered by ripping out his throat.

"We'd better carry on looking for Qunan." Said Salomé.

"He is alone now and heading towards the ruins." Said Sveta.

They all turned towards her, as she continued.

"All his people are dead, but he survived. I've tried talking to him, but he just ignores me."

"How do we find him ?" Asked Salomé.

"Just follow the green lines. The mines go for miles and there are lots of troopers between you and Arje, so be careful."

Sveta silently vanished into the wall and after spreading her team out, Salomé took them deeper into the mine.

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Princess and her party had only just left the bay of the Old One when the plasma bolts started to arrive from the Enforcer craft above. After dropping to the ground they quickly realised they were in no immediate danger and started for the mine again. They weren't far behind Salomé and her team, but having Ojetin with them slowed them down. His heart was in the mission, but his body wasn't having a good day.

"Don't worry," said Princess, "we've enough people to carry you if we need to."

"That shouldn't be necessary, let's keep to a walk, not a gallop." He replied.

They reached the mine entrance and found the same aftermath of battle that Salomé had found. As they examined the dead troopers loud explosions and flashes started to come from the direction of the settlement.

"Quite a battle over there." Said Estrid.

"Poor devils, there's no one to back them up."

Princess spread her troops out against either wall of the tunnel and then they set off following the green lines. Her people were now in their element. To the fighters from the levels on Ixir, the mine was almost a home from home. As they approached a darkened tunnel entrance Estrid suddenly stopped and the whole party stopped, many of them grumbling and watched as she aimed her Yakkie into the dark and fired. There was a scream from the darkness and then silence.

"With me at the front." Princess said to Estrid.

As they set off again it was obvious from the way they watched her, that all the soldiers were going to take their cue from the young girl. They passed the bodies of Salomé's soldiers and the battle scene around Hogni, and carried on following the green line towards the ruins.

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Baby wasn't stupid. Yes, she would be the first to agree it took her a while to think things through, but she got there in the end. She'd once ripped a mercs arm off for pointing out that she was a bit slow, or has he put it 'thick as shit', but she was certain she was wasting her time attacking the Enforcer craft. The Raptor turned in a wide circle and approached the quarter mile long Enforcer craft from the rear.

"Any gaps in their shield?" She had asked Chlo

"Weak at the rear Ion drive outlet." Had been the reply.

Baby fired both blasters at the edge of the Ion drive outlet and nothing happened and to add insult to injury there was no longer any return fire. They'd seen her carry out six, or maybe seven attack runs and each had just caused the same brief flare of the huge crafts shields. Baby flew just feet away from the craft along its length from rear to the front and not a single blaster was fired at her. She'd watched the blue beams destroy the fighters and the shuttle and had been pleased that Qunan wouldn't have to fight reinforcements.

"Is Qunan alive?" She asked Chlo

She was beginning to get the idea of a plan, but she'd only do it to help Qunan.

"Yes," said Chlo, "Sventa saw him deep in the mines quite recently."

Baby brought the craft round in a long wide circle and headed back towards the Enforcer and told Chlo.

"I have an idea."

She then asked Chlo how to set the craft to gain maximum mass and the best setting for high speed. Not that the small craft had much in the way of controls, it was pretty much a point and press fire kind of craft. No room for an escape pod and no ejector seat. Who after all would want to eject into space, unless they enjoyed the sensation of having their blood boil in their veins.

"This is for Qunan." She told Chlo.

Baby had one of those rare moments of complete certainty in her life, one of the solid blocks her therapist had told her to hang into.

"What is your real name?" Asked Chlo

Baby had to think back to the time before Qunan had taken her into his team. Augments don't play well with others and she was just leaving a hard labour colony after receiving her third

sentence for wounding. Qunan had told her he could use her and she'd followed him through so many raids and missions she'd lost count.

"Amy, my name is Amy Jilsk."

There was only one outcome from her present trajectory and Chlo wasn't naïve or stupid enough to try to talk her out of it.

"You'll be remembered Amy Jilsk." She said.

Baby pushed the craft to its maximum speed and aimed straight at the front of the Enforcer craft. Just above the front antenna array was a flat armoured section, and she hit it at about ten times the speed of sound. There were four hundred troopers and three thousand crew on the Enforcer craft, Spirit of New Keo, and 120 of the crew died with Baby as her Raptor broke through the shields, and armour plating and opened up the navigation section to the vacuum of space.

"She's pierced their shields." Said Alyz as she watched.

Raptor craft are incredible strong and heavy, and the various section of the small craft caused huge amounts of damage as they broke up and spread out through the huge Enforcer craft. One section hit the internal lift shafts and caused them to depressurise. Another ripped through the forward mess hall, and another eighty of the crew discovered the delights of trying to breathe in a vacuum.

"Structural integrity compromised, Baby might have done it." Said Chlo

The Old One now had a hole in their defences to fire through and he was now firing all his heavy blasters deep into the enemy craft. The vacuum of space was now helping to pull the craft out of shape, as more and more sections were breached by the wreckage of the raptor. Then came the fatal piece of bad luck for The Spirit of New Keo, as the massive pod from Baby's craft broke through the wall of the fusion reactor, and hit the fusion vessel itself.

"I don't believe it!" Said Alyz.

The fusion vessel kept a miniature sun tightly controlled in strong magnetic fields and once that delicate equilibrium was disturbed, all that power erupted out and turned the Enforcer craft and the three thousand four hundred on board, into a bright ball of flame.

"Any of the debris heading our way?" Asked Kittara.

"No, any large fragments will come down about ten miles west of us." Answered Chlo.

The craft had been using a powered static orbit to target the Old One, and once the drives went the debris hurtled into the atmosphere, creating a meteor display that lit the mine area up like daylight.

"How long until they might call for help Chlo?" Asked Kittara.

"Their high command will know they lost an Enforcer craft, but it depends on how many meetings they need to have, and with who that will decide how long."

"Tell the teams the good news Chlo," said Kittara, "but tell them the mission carries on as before, and that they have just under an hour."

Kittara didn't say what they must all be thinking. Lost Enforcer craft or not, the New Keo Group might decide not to ask the Guard for help.