

CHAPTER ELEVEN

REVAN SHIVERED IN THE COLD. Beside him, Malak said something, but the fierce wind whipping across the plateau devoured his words.

"What?" Revan shouted.

"Are you sure it's here?" Malak called back.

"It's here," Revan said with a nod. "I can feel it."

"Maybe it's on the other side."

Revan glanced over at the other peak rising up beside them, barely visible through the swirling snow. It was nearly identical to the one they were on— a tall, narrow column of wind-carved ice and snow rising up several kilometers from Rekkiad's surface, its peak worn to a smooth, flat plain of ice.

"It's this one," Revan answered confidently. "The entrance is around here somewhere."

The two figures moved slowly back and forth across the exposed plateau, searching with the Force as much as with their eyes.

"Here!" Malak shouted. "I found it!"

Revan woke from the dream with a start, his mind groggy as he tried to get his bearings. It was cool in the thermal tent he and Canderous shared. The insulated lining kept out the worst of the weather, but the nighttime temperatures were still low enough that Revan felt a chill through two layers of clothes and his sleeping bag.

As his eyes adjusted to the soft glow of the small heater in the center of the tent, he was able to make out more details of his surroundings. Canderous was still asleep beside him, wrapped tightly in his sleeping bag and snoring loudly.

Revan's mind began to reassemble the bits and pieces from the previous night.

He'd hoped Canderous would offer more details about his marriage to Veela after she'd stormed out of the supply shack, but he'd stayed silent on the subject. Despite his curiosity, Revan hadn't pressed him. Instead they'd spent the rest of the night celebrating the big man's return to his people. Edric and the others offered up countless tales of Canderous's youth. His many battles and victories against overwhelming odds were the stuff of legend among Clan Ordo.

They'd also offered up plenty of *kri'gee*, a bitter Mandalorian ale. Not wanting to be resented as an outsider, Revan had matched the other revelers drink for drink. The vile beverage packed plenty of kick; he hadn't had a hangover this bad since his wedding night. His head was pinning, his eyes were blurred, and his mouth tasted like he'd been chewing on bantha fur. He'd still be sleeping it off if not for the dream.

No, not a dream. Another memory bubbling to the surface.

He and Malak had been searching for something here on Rekkiad. Something that was somehow connected to Mandalore's Mask. He didn't know what it was, but with a little help he might be able to use the details of his dream to figure out where they had been looking.

He peeled back the sleeping bag and immediately felt goose bumps prickling up on the flesh beneath his long-sleeved shirt. Ignoring the cold, he picked his way through the semi-darkness until he found his personal holocomm lying under a pile of clothes in one corner of the tent.

Scooting back into the warmth of his sleeping bag, Revan activated the device. "Tee- Three, can you read me?"

A tiny holographic image of the droid materialized in front of him, beeping with concern.

"Everything's fine," Revan reassured in a whisper. "Just try to keep it down. Canderous is still asleep."

The astromech's response was an excited whistle, though the volume was slightly lower than before.

"See? I knew you'd be able to put the *Hawk* back together without my help."

T3 beeped indignantly.

"Yeah, that snow gets everywhere. But it'll melt. Besides, you can worry about that later. I need you to do something for me. Start scanning the topography maps for two massive columns of ice standing close together. Two or three kilometers high, at least. When you find them, send me the coordinates."

There were roughly thirty seconds of silence on the other end before T3 chirped a reply.

"Great work, Tee- Three. Remember, keep an eye on the ship. I'll call you if we need anything else."

Revan turned off the holocomm, knowing the easy part was over. T3 might have been slightly annoyed with him, but dealing with the droid was going to be a whole lot easier than getting the snoring giant beside him up and moving.

"Wake up," he said, reaching across the heater to shake Canderous out of his slumber. "We need to talk."

Canderous grumbled something profane in Mando'a at him and rolled over onto his other side.

"It's important," Revan said, shaking him even harder. "You have to get Veela to move the camp."

“Huh? What? What about Veela?” Canderous mumbled, opening one eye.

“You have to get her to move the camp.”

The eye closed again. “That’s her call, not mine. She’s the clan chief.”

“I think they’re looking for Mandalore’s Mask in the wrong place.”

Both eyes snapped open, and Canderous levered himself up to a sitting position. “Well, why didn’t you say so?”

“EVERYBODY’S HERE,” Veela declared. “Say what you have to say.”

Revan’s head was still pounding from the *kri’gee*, and in the close quarters of the supply shed her voice was loud enough to make him wince.

Including Canderous and Revan, a total of eight had gathered for the impromptu council. Veela had called them together at Canderous’s insistence— three men and two women. Edric was there, and Revan recognized most of the others from the night before, though he couldn’t recall their names.

“We have to move the camp,” Canderous told them.

As when they first arrived, Revan and Canderous had decided to let Canderous do most of the talking. It would be easier to convince the Mandalorians if they heard the idea from one of their own— provided Veela was willing to listen to anything her husband had to say.

“Move the camp?” she asked incredulously. “You think it’s so easy to just pick up and go?”

“It took our scouts weeks to find this location,” one of the other women chimed in.

“This is a good spot,” Edric agreed. “We’re sheltered from the worst of the wind and snow. The mountain protects us from getting flanked, and the only way in is right past our sentries.”

“Give me one good reason we should move,” Veela demanded.

“Because we’ll never find Mandalore’s Mask if we stay here,” Canderous answered.

There was a long moment of silence, his words hanging in the air.

“Nobody knows where Revan hid the Mask,” Veela said quietly.

“The clans have each staked out their territory, hoping it’s in their destiny to find that which we all seek.”

“Seems like a poor way to choose a leader,” Revan offered.

Veela glared at him, but it was one of the other women who replied.

“Fate will make the choice for us. Whichever clan is destined to find the Mask, will.”

"Is that how all the clans ended up here on Rekkiad?" Revan countered. "Fate? Chance? Blind luck?"

"You show your ignorance when you speak of things you don't understand," Veela said. "Fate and destiny are not the same as luck. It was not chance that brought us here. It was persistence. Perseverance."

We are here because we are *strong*." She paused a moment, then continued a little more calmly. "When Revan hid Mandalore's Mask, most of our people scattered in disgrace. But some of us refused to give up. We stayed behind to look for what was lost instead of running off to become mercenaries and hired thugs."

As she spoke, her eyes flicked toward Canderous. Revan followed her gaze to see his friend staring at the floor in shame.

"For years we have kept up our search," she continued. "We know Revan disappeared for three days after the massacre at Malachor Five. There are only a handful of stable hyperspace lanes in that sector, only a few dozen habitable planets he would have been able to journey to in that time. So we have been searching each world in turn, scouring the surface meter by meter. On the first world there were less than fifty of us; it took us two years to explore the entire planet. But with each world our numbers grew. More clans joined in the search, and each clan's numbers increased. Our quest gave us purpose; it united us as a people once more."

She looked back at Canderous. "Slowly those who turned their backs on the Mandalorian ways have come trickling back. Now we number in the thousands. Over a hundred clans have gathered on Rekkiad. If we fail to find the Mask here, we will move on to the next world. And our numbers will continue to grow. Eventually we will find what we seek. And when one of our own finally reclaims Mandalore's Mask, our numbers will be legion. On that day the new Mandalore will call upon the armies of our people, and we will answer!"

She turned and glared at Revan once more. "That is what we mean when we speak of fate," she concluded "We will find what we seek. It is inevitable. It is the destiny of our people."

The end of her speech was marked by a solemn silence. Looking around the room, Revan could see the power her words had on the other Mandalorians. Even Canderous had been moved.

"I can help you achieve your destiny," Revan promised. "I know where Revan hid the Mask. Listen to me, and I will help you find it."

"Impossible," Veela said with a shake of her head. "Nobody knows where he hid Mandalore's Mask."

"I have access to resources you don't," Revan insisted, choosing his words carefully. "Republic records. Military transcripts. Battle plans. Flight paths and navigation charts. You say you aren't even

sure if the Mask is on Rekkiad. But I am. The Mask is here, on this world. And with my help, Clan Ordo will be the ones who find it.”

Veela didn’t say anything at first. Instead she turned and fixed her gaze on Canderous. “Avner is your friend,” she said, her words almost an accusation. “Can we trust him?”

“I wouldn’t have told him of our search if I didn’t trust him with my life,” Canderous answered without hesitation. “And I wouldn’t have brought him if I didn’t believe he could help us.”

All eyes focused on Veela as she considered all she had heard.

“Where do you suggest we move our camp to?” she finally asked.

“About fifty kilometers from here two columns of ice rise straight up, towering several kilometers above Rekkiad’s surface.”

“The Twin Spears,” Edric blurted out excitedly. “Are you saying the Mask is there?”

“There is an entrance to a tunnel in the plateau on top of one of the pillars. The tunnel leads deep into the heart of the ice. I believe that is where Revan hid Mandalore’s Mask.”

“The Twin Spears are in Clan Jendri’s territory,” Veela warned. “If they catch us moving in on their turf, there will be blood.”

“Did you really expect to find the Mask without having to fight for it?” Canderous asked.

Veela shook her head. Then she turned her attention to the rest of her advisers, scanning their faces, reading their emotions.

“Pack up the camp!” she shouted at last, thrusting her fist into the air. “We’re marching on the Twin Spears!”

REVAN WAS AMAZED by the efficiency of the Mandalorians. Veela’s order spread quickly through the camp, prompting everyone into a flurry of activity. Each individual had a specific job, which they carried out with military precision. Some took down the tents, wrapping them into tightly rolled bundles and packing them away into footlockers along with small personal items. Others emptied the supply hut, loading the crates of food, generators, heaters, and fuel onto the heavy cargo sleds.

Within an hour they were under way, all trace of their old camp left behind as three dozen men and women headed out in a long, well-spaced column.

A team of six led by Edric scouted up ahead to find the best path and to make sure the way was clear. Another half dozen fell farther back to guard the column’s flank. The rest marched in pairs between the two patrols; while one pulled the cargo sled, the other marched alongside with weapons drawn, wary for an ambush. Every hour the partners would switch positions.

In the middle of the column, the six Basilisk war droids trudged along, each towing a massive cargo sled loaded with hundreds of kilos of gear. To Revan, they looked like five-meter-tall, two-legged dragons. They walked with heavy, lumbering strides, their wings folded beneath their long metallic bodies. High-powered laser cannons were mounted on their flexible, armored necks, allowing the droids to fire in all directions. Each was controlled by a single pilot seated atop the curved spine.

Not surprisingly, Veela was one of the pilots; commanding a Basilisk war droid was an honor reserved for only the most revered warriors of the clan. Revan couldn't help but notice Canderous casting wistful glances at the great metal beasts, recalling his own days of glory now that he was forced to walk beside them.

Veela set a grueling pace, which offered plenty of distraction from both idle thoughts and the biting cold. When they stopped for a one-hour break at midday, Revan felt as if he might collapse into the nearest snowbank. All he wanted to do was eat his food and rest up for the next leg of the journey, but that was not to be.

Like the night before, a steady stream of visitors came by to speak with Canderous. The older members of Clan Ordo came to recount stories of past adventures they had shared with him. Some of the younger ones who had been raised on tales of his exploits came to see the living legend with their own eyes.

Even as an outsider, it was obvious to Revan that his friend had been fully accepted back into the clan. But there was more to it than the mere joy of a prodigal son's return. The Mandalorians were energized, excited. Gossip had spread through the camp, and everyone seemed to know that Mandalore's Mask might soon be in their grasp. And though Veela had technically been the one to give the order to move out, everyone also seemed to understand that Canderous's arrival had been the true catalyst for this call to action.

The break ended far too soon for Revan's liking, but by calling on the Force to revitalize his tired limbs, he managed to stand up and get his feet moving when they set out again.

Darkness came well before they reached their destination. Edric and his scouts had discovered a small valley carved into the ice where they could take shelter for the night, and Veela called a halt to their march. The camp was set up as quickly and proficiently as it had been struck earlier that morning, and Revan soon found himself in a tent with Canderous, curled up in his sleeping bag on the verge of dozing off.

He estimated that they had covered thirty kilometers on their trek. The realization that they had gone well over half the distance already came as a welcome relief, allowing him to drift off into much-needed sleep.

There were no dreams to plague him that night, though he did wake up once when he heard someone fumbling at the entrance to the tent.

"Someone's outside," he whispered to Canderous before realizing he was alone in the tent.

A few seconds later the exterior flap was pulled aside, letting in a blast of cold air. Canderous followed in its wake. He sealed the flap, quietly crept back over to his sleeping bag, and wrapped himself inside.

"Where've you been?" Revan whispered.

"Sorry. Tried not to wake you," Canderous replied.

"You didn't answer my question."

"Veela and I had some catching up to do," the big man said, and even in the darkness Revan could tell he was grinning from ear to ear.

They didn't speak again, but Revan couldn't help noticing the irony. When he'd left his wife behind to come here, he'd never imagined that Canderous would be reuniting with his own. He didn't begrudge Canderous his happiness, but it made him miss Bastila all the more.

They broke camp early the next morning, and by the time they stopped for lunch they could clearly see the distant outline of the Twin Spears through Rekkiad's perpetual ice fog and swirling snow.

"We're well inside Clan Jendri's territory," Veela said, coming over to sit beside Revan and Canderous as they tore into their rations.

"Gotta stay sharp."

"Do you think they know we're here?" Revan asked.

"Hard to say. If they're anywhere near the Twin Spears, the scouts would have seen us by now. But it's a big territory. They could be a hundred kilometers away in any direction."

"Maybe we'll get lucky and they'll never know we're here," Revan said optimistically.

Veela glanced over at Canderous and shook her head.

"We Mandalorians have a saying," Canderous explained. "A warrior who doesn't hope for battle has no hope during battle."

"That's a good one," Revan admitted. "But here's one I like: You can't lose a battle you never fight."

"You can't win it, either," Veela said.

They finished their food in silence. Once they were done, the group set out again. Two hours later they reached their final destination, a small, low-lying patch of ground nestled between the Spears.

"Sleep well," Veela announced to her followers as they set up camp. "Tomorrow Clan Ordo will claim its destiny!"

THE ATTACK CAME just before dawn. Subconsciously, Revan felt the danger through the Force, causing his eyes to snap open a split second before the sentries sounded the alarm.

He was alone in his tent again. Obviously Canderous had decided to spend another night with Veela.

Knowing his friend would meet him on the battlefield, Revan kicked free of his sleeping bag and struggled quickly into his layers of clothing. Remembering his promise to Canderous, he tucked his lightsaber out of sight beneath his belt, arming himself instead with the twin blasters he had been carrying since they'd left the *Ebon Hawk*.

The sounds of battle could already be heard outside, and Revan charged from the tent to join the fray. All around him he saw the men and women of Clan Ordo, most clad only in underclothes and a few scraps of plated armor, battling the forces of Clan Jendri that were swarming in from all sides. Clan Jendri outnumbered Clan Ordo by almost two to one, though Revan noticed they had only four Basilisks.

The Basilisks swooped back and forth above the battle, raining blasterfire down from the sky. Immediately Revan recognized the Jendri strategy: they had concentrated their attack near the Ordo Basilisks, hoping to keep Veela and her fellow pilots from reaching the deadly machines.

Revan opened fire with his blasters, drawing on the Force to augment his accuracy. His first volley dropped an enemy soldier charging toward him; his second took out a sniper half hidden on a ridge over twenty meters away. But he knew the battle wouldn't be won by blasters alone.

He sprinted across the center of the camp, heading toward the rear where the Ordo Basilisks were parked. Enemy blasterfire poured down, forcing him to duck, dodge, and weave, but none of the bolts found a mark.

Canderous and Veela had managed to get there ahead of him. Basilisk fire had them pinned down behind an outcropping of jagged, snow-tipped rocks, along with the rest of the Ordo Basilisk pilots.

Revan skidded to a stop, dropping to his knees and sliding the last few meters across the icy surface to join them. Canderous flashed him a fierce grin.

Moving in unison, Canderous and Veela popped up from behind the rocks to fire at the enemy war droids. The blasterfire ricocheted harmlessly off the armor plating, and they were forced to duck again when the Basilisk's rider veered it around to return fire.

"Welcome to the party!" Canderous shouted to Revan. "Got any bright ideas?"

"Have you tried shooting the pilots?" Revan asked.

"Easier said than done," Veela answered.

It was true; the Mandalorians riding on the back of the war droids were held in place by heavily armored saddles that protected most of their bodies. A few key spots near their heads and shoulders were vulnerable, but hitting a moving target that size would require a small miracle, even for Revan.

"All we need is to buy a few seconds," Veela said. "Just enough time for us to get into our Basilisks and fire them up."

Revan nudged Canderous with his elbow, drawing the big man's attention as he dropped the blaster from his hand and moved his open palm to cover the lightsaber hilt under his belt. Canderous responded with a faint nod.

"I can create a distraction," Revan said. "But you'll have to move fast."

"Whatever you're thinking, do it," Veela said. "If we don't get to our Basilisks, we don't stand a chance."

Discarding one of his blasters, Revan leapt over the rock, drawing and igniting his lightsaber in a single motion. The glowing green blade instantly drew the attention of all four Jendri Basilisks, as the pilots swung their beasts around to target the hated Jedi who had suddenly appeared in their midst.

Revan had fought plenty of Basilisks during his campaign against the Mandalorians. The trick was to keep moving and get in close enough to limit the effectiveness of their blaster cannons. Though capable of achieving high speeds during a bombing run or charging enemy lines, the droids were slowed down by their heavy armor whenever they tried to turn or change course.

He charged the nearest rider, zigzagging to keep the Basilisk from getting a clear shot. Running directly beneath the belly of the lowflying beast, he leapt high in the air to slash his lightsaber across the droid's tail. The energy blade ricocheted off the armor plating, but not before slicing through one of the stabilizing fins at the tip.

The pilot tried to pull his Basilisk into a steep climb so he could loop around and come diving back down at Revan— a difficult maneuver even without a missing stabilizer fin. The damaged droid tried to respond to his command, but it veered wildly out of control, turning on its side and nearly dumping the rider to the ground.

Revan took the opportunity to leap on the Basilisk's back, grabbing hold of the back of the pilot's seat. The Mandalorian reached back over his shoulder to grab at the stowaway, but Revan easily avoided his grasp as he slid his lightsaber tip through the back of the seat and through the pilot's torso.

The Basilisk screamed as the semi- sentient droid felt the death of its rider through the symbiotic link the Mandalorians shared with their mechanical mounts. Left without guidance or direction, the simple artificial intelligence programs reverted to a primal attempt to rid the Basilisk of its new rider; the thrashing sent the Basilisk into a deadly dive.

Revan leapt clear just before it hit the ground. His fall cushioned by the snow, he rolled, sprang back to his feet, and turned his attention to the three remaining Basilisks.

He wasn't surprised to see them circling high above him, well out of the reach of even a Jedi's leap. Just as he had learned how to fight Basilisks during the Mandalorian Wars, their riders had also learned the best strategies to use when facing a member of the Jedi Order. If they stayed at a distance and coordinated their fire, it was only a matter of time until they brought Revan down.

Fortunately, he wasn't fighting alone. His distraction had given Veela and the other Clan Ordo riders the time they needed. As the Jendri pilots prepared to retaliate against Revan, six Ordo Basilisks took to the air in attack formation.

Now outnumbered two to one, the Jendri pilots banked their war droids away from the enemy squadron and fled. Instead of pursuing, the Ordo riders turned their attention to the enemy forces on the ground.

The battle quickly turned into a rout. Even with superior numbers, the Jendri troops couldn't match the awesome firepower of half a dozen Basilisks. The carnage lasted less than five minutes before the Jendri ranks broke.

Revan didn't bother to participate in the final stages of the slaughter. He'd known the battle was over the instant Veela and the others took to the sky.

He looked around for Canderous and found him perched atop one of the Basilisks, screaming out a Mandalorian war cry as he arced back and forth across the field, butchering his enemies. Such vicious savagery was typical of Mandalorian warfare, and yet Revan knew that once the battle was over, Clan Jendri would hold no grudge against the victors. If Mandalore ever rose again and called them to fight alongside Clan Ordo, they would answer without hesitation.

His thoughts were interrupted when a great shadow passed over him, followed a second later by the heavy thud as Canderous brought his Basilisk in for a landing a few meters away.

"Better put that thing away," he said, leaping to the ground and nodding at Revan's lightsaber.

"Why, you think Veela's going to forget I have it?" Revan asked. But he extinguished the blade as he spoke.

"I doubt anyone other than the pilots saw what happened. No point advertising what you really are any more than we have to."

Revan changed the subject. "You think they'll try another attack?"

"No," Canderous said.

"You sure? I get the feeling they don't like us being in their territory."

"They fled the battle." Canderous grinned. "It's our territory now."

His grin grew wider. "Felt good to fly into battle again."

"Where'd you get the mount?" Revan asked.

"Belongs to a young man named Grizzer. He still hasn't been tested in battle, so Veela told me I could use it if we ran into any trouble."

"When'd she tell you that?"

"The other night."

"You mean when you were sharing her tent?"

Canderous shrugged.

"What does Grizzer think about that?"

"Veela's the clan leader. He'll do what she says."

"And what's she going to say now that she knows I'm a Jedi?" Revan wondered.

"Guess we're going to find out," Canderous said as Veela's Basilisk swooped in to land beside them.

The Clan Ordo leader didn't say a word as she climbed down from her seat. She walked toward the two men, her expression unreadable.

"Go help with the wounded," she said to Revan. "You Jedi are good at that, right?"

He nodded.

"After that get some rest. Both of you. Tomorrow we climb the first Spear. Be ready to leave at daybreak." Her words were calm, almost casual, but there was a fierce intensity in her eyes that made Revan wonder if he'd made an enormous mistake.