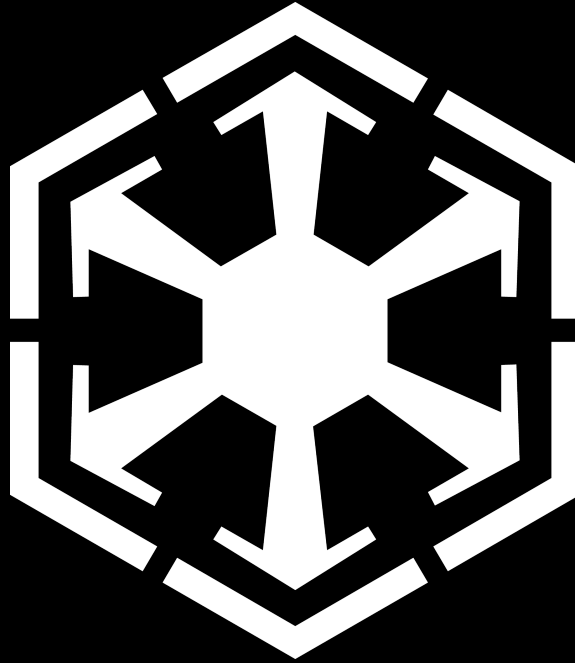


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Nicht-Ka Expedition II

By Apprentice Sekker



My Lords and others who read this,

The second Nicht-Ka Expedition ventured to a cave around half a mile from the initial site visited by Sith Leive and her team, following scans performed by Th'Ratsatsa.

Attending

- Apprentice Rhysand Sekker (mission lead)
- Apprentice Vaera Vipion
- Apprentice Emlar Racta

Mission Account

Arriving some distance from the cave, we secured our equipment and set out, soon entering the cave itself. At its entrance, we found a Pureblood skeleton of indeterminable age, its bone marrow sucked out and bones near the neck melted. Further in, we found a small silver box, which contained survival equipment and a note written in Common Sith:

"If you are reading this, do not tarry here, we are surely dead. Return and win the war in our name."

"We were dispatched from the great fleet of Lord Sadow himself, but the Republic caught us in orbit of Nicht Ka. Our ship was going down, and we fled here on an escape pod. We expected to be picked up but - it seems not. Zelat has died, the idiot was so thirsty he drank the waters outside of the cave and died screaming at the threshold. There are three of us left, but we are dehydrated, hungry, tired and burned. There is the Grotthu, of course - perhaps we will eat him soon."

"This planet is blighted - holy, but blighted. Leave if you can."

I have taken the note with me: it will be presented to Lord Iezkon as a historical artefact unless otherwise instructed. The skeleton outside the cave was thus identified as Zelat: liquid ammonia explains the molten bones.

Deeper, we came across three more corpses: two Purebloods and an alien. Beyond it, a larger cave: a camp of some tents, with a carved stone in Common Sith, a further corpse laid with a chisel in hand before it. It read:

"This is the last record of the crew of the Saud, proud flagship of Lord Drezaal. I was Grethen, captain of the Lord's guard, and landed here with my fellow guardsman Yutel, a Zuguruk engineer by the name of Kotzal, a diplomat by the name of Zelat and a Herglic slave known as... nothing godly, I could not record how it was written if I wished to."

"Zelat died first, drinking nearly pure ammonia - the fool. The Grotthu killed Kotzal when he tried to kill and eat the alien, aided by Yutel. Though they succeeded, Yutel fell to his wounds soon after. I record this fate [so] that you might learn from it."

"May Typhojem's spiteful fist crush the Republic, Kressh and the fool Daragon whelps."

It should be noted that while the engraving and note mention three Purebloods and an alien, we found five corpses.

At this point, the shuttle outside picked up an individual approaching the cave. We readied for combat and went to meet it: it had a distinct Dark-Sided Presence.

Friend

The individual we came across was a middle-aged human male, with pale skin and gaunt, sickly features. He was covered in dark red tattoos and wore simple black robes with a detailed collar, covered in Kittât runes.

We engaged him in conversation. Questions are marked in red, and answers in white. He wore a powerful Thought Shield, preventing access to his thoughts.

- **Identify yourself.**
 - I am Friend, to you. Come, the air this close to the entrance agrees with me.
- **Do you bear a name?**
 - Friend will suffice if it pleasure you, my Lords. Nicht-Ka is not a pleasant planet, dear Lords, and it is the wrong place. Wrong time, regardless.
- **What place would be right, what time?**
 - Now that is a good question, Apprentice Vaera. Excellent in fact - though I am not sure of the answer.
- **And what can you tell us, if anything at all?**
 - I have told you the crux of the matter already, wrong place - wrong time. So many things are. The crew of the Saud, certainly.
- **Wrong for what? What purpose?**
 - A fine question, my Lord. You have other friends, elsewhere.
- **But is it a good time and place for yourself?**
 - I suppose that depends on your perspective, my Lord.
- **And perspective of someone seeking answers tells me something contrary that you say. I found answers to questions I didn't ask, and found questions that I am yet to answer, in this very place.**
 - Spiced, cured sausage, chilli preserves, good cheese - a fine time and place for now, I suppose.
- **You are toying with us. Why?**
 - No, my Lord. Not toying with you - enjoying my time.
- **And what is Friend's purpose?**
 - Ah, that is lovely. I am here to be a friend - and to pass on a message to you from other friends.
- **To us - from other friends. Which friends are those?**
 - The Witnesses of Lament, of course. They have been your friends for a short time now, though they mourn the lack of conversation.

- **They mourn the old too, do they not?**
 - They do. And so do I, of course. So few have the spine for it now.
- **This grand design of regression will not come to pass.**
 - I am very sad to hear you see it as regression, my Lord, not restoration, my Lord. Perhaps it is your alien blood.
- **Or I am merely recognising the truth - that you serve and speak for false heirs. False heirs that need to bend and twist others for a dream that is not even theirs. Tools, who have outlived their creators and now merely emulate their ambitions in a pitiful effort to maintain an identity. Tell me, why do they lack even their own voices?**
 - You should not speak so ill of a friend, Apprentice Emlar. It suits you poorly. They will speak in time, I am certain. When the time and place are right.
- **If they intend to sway, they will need to sing.**
 - Sing they will, I am sure, my Lord.
- **Good. Then it means they can scream.**
- **Thank the friends you see in the Witnesses of Lament that we fail to, for words for us. I hope when the time is right, they won't just speak, but listen too. And if they think themselves our friends, they didn't show it properly. Nor left means to show our wish in return. So we chase in the dark, for places like these.**
 - Ah, indeed. We can all scream, look merely at the state of our poor Empire. Just a little longer, Apprentice Vaera, it grows closer each day, each breath taken.

Friend departed, and the shuttle informed us that he was setting up a metal canister not far from our drop point, its nature was unknown and a visual was impossible due to interference from the ammonia-filled atmosphere. The shuttle reported that Friend sat down in prayer (which correlates with the Pilot over Nicht-Ka), but when we approached, it exploded in a wave of heat, killing Friend and reducing him to ashes, while not seriously harming us due to our distance to the object.

All three of us had a brief connection with something far larger. A Presence far away. It Saw us, and when we sought to trace the connection, blood vessels burst:

- Apprentice Sekker: the nose
- Apprentice Vaera: the eyes

Apprentice Racta vomited. The Presence is vast, and it is hungry. The sithspawn are playthings to it. We saw an emerald eye, reflected in the collar.

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