

Ego: "Uh Dorinda what's going on?"

Dorinda replies urgently: "Summon your griffins. We have to get out of here."

Izar summons his griffin so we can get out of here, invoking Fei's name and feather. He has an internal sense that Fei is on the way.

With a harsh whisper: "Dorinda. *What* is going on?"

"Elite Vardum assassins."

"Ok. A party of you. Yes."

Hrothulf turns on his force field and readies an action with his plasma rifle. If they appear aggressive, he wants to be ready to plasmify them.

Dorinda also summons her griffin, and before the dagger descends, she looks around and says, "We might be able to take one of them together, but we need to split up and meet back and the ship. We need to scatter. We're no match for all of them together."

Looking to Ego, she says, "You should ride with me. We're going invisible."

Dorinda whispers to Ego, asking whether you have EMP tech, and says you should use it even if it impacts Dorinda

Dorinda starts to run off the cliff.

Off the butte, we are in the mezzolux. It would go pitch black maybe 20 miles to the west.

The two daggers from the north descend on Darnit. The first one attempts to catch him off-guard. They both have 18-inch blades that kind of resemble throwing knives but bigger. They don't speak at all; they just attack. The first one Darnit manages to parry and dodge, taking the blade off his shoulder armor. The second however manages to slip the blade between a weak part in his armor, and he takes serious damage. He maintains the use of his left arm, but he can feel his body fighting off some kind of paralyzing poison as his muscles tighten for a second, but fighting it, flex back.

They descend on Hrothulf, and he takes his shot at the encroaching southwest dagger. He hits solidly. She combusts into flame, and stops-drops-and-rolls almost immediately. It prevents most of the fire's damage, but she is forced to roll to the side for now.

Izar has an assassin coming at him, but she misses, Izar ducking and dodging significantly faster than he thought he could. But it only takes half a second to realize that might have been intentional as the droid skips past and grabs the polvimithe disc we just acquired. Izar figures, based on what Dorinda said, that attacking won't do a lot of good. But Izar casts *Shocking Grasp* and tells Hiare to grab the disc. Hiare blinks over, but is unable to wrest the disc away.

Ego also gets an attack of opportunity and strikes her well. But she mostly takes the punch and shrugs it off, going about her business of picking up the disc.

Darnit delays action, asking Ego and Hrothulf to move more than 10ft out of his way, in order to cast *Arms of Hadar* without hurting his comrades.

Ego to Dorinda: "When you say they're Elite Vardum Assassins, do you mean they are Vardum who are Assassins or assassins of Vardum?"

"They are sent by the Vardum to assassinate us."

"Are they themselves assassins?"

"I don't know. Checking..." [...] She eventually discerns that they are Vardum possessed, and tells Ego.

Ego moves behind the dagger with the polvimithe and prepares to attempt to take it after Darnit casts *Arms of Hadar*, in hopes that it will be somewhat stunned and pushed back.

Fei arrives beside Izar and Izar and Hiare mount the griffin. There is much rejoicing and irresistible dancing. He waits along with Ego, to help try to recover the polvimithe.

Hrothulf picks up his feather and summons Poyraz. While waiting, Hrothulf moves out of range for Darnit.

Darnit casts *Arms of Hadar*. Two miss their saves, including the one grabbing the polvimithe. Dorinda makes her's.

Darnit uses *Action Surge* to disengage from the nearest dagger and runs toward Hrothulf, asking if he can join on Hrothulf's immovable rod. Hrothulf responds, "When it comes to my immovable rod there's always room for one more."

Ego deftly snatches the polvimithe with the help of Izar, then crouches to grab her feather. She scuttles to the other side of Dorinda and away from the dagger, relieved to see Serafina approaching.

Fei is like "Rwaa!" and then attacks, but misses.

Meanwhile Dorinda is like, "Stop it just leave!"

But on her way out Izar pulls out his ranseur to give a little *zshzh* *Shocking Grasp* with it on the way out.

Izar knows he got her and sees the lightning jump around, but she hardly reacts at all. Most of it jumps to the blade she's holding as though it is channeled there.

Izar says, "Fly, you fools!" and winks at Dorinda as Izar, Hiare, and Fei fly away to the northwest.

Serafina drops down, Dorinda jumps on and says, "Ego, jump off the cliff. We'll get you."

Ego takes a deep breath and, not even waiting to exhale, decides she trusts her friend and jumps.

Serafina catches Ego gently with her talons, swoops up as she catches the draft, and disappears in an instant.

Darnit and Hrothulf see that all of the faux-Dorindas engage their Mandalorian-style jetpacks and assume a flight formation and head off in the exact same direction that the true Dorinda just left, as though in pursuit. We still have not heard them say a single word.

Ego clutches the polvimithe close to her chest. She is feeling a bit more possessive than she ought, and the polvimithe shrinks and forms a bracelet around her wrist, the indentation opening as the center and the nine holes circling around, hovering about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch off her wrist on every side. She is verily shocked and awed. She tucks the feather somewhere safe and looks behind to see if anyone is giving chase.

Izar wants to see her old sage master Visparo before she leaves and knows he will be near the ship, but she also doesn't want to bring doom (*Vardoom*) on his house. He flies toward the ship, thinking they are likely chasing Dorinda and the polvimithe, but he keeps an eye on the skies behind him.

Poyraz thuds on the butte and the ground shakes a little from his superhero landing. Darnit, Hrothulf, and he are the only beings left on the butte. They mount, and follow the direction the dagger went. The voice of Dorinda echoes, "Don't be heroes", but they give chase, moving within striking distance.

Darnit calls Nilchi. The plan is, once Nilchi comes, for Darnit to jump to her. Then for both to fire, then split and flee in opposite directions. The goal is not to engage, but to split them up and slow them down enough for Dorinda and Ego to get away.

Dorinda looks over her shoulder and recognizes that the dagger is still in pursuit and, to Ego, she says, "i think they can still see us despite the invisibility. if we can isolate one of them and incapacitate her, I'd like to bring her with us."

"bold. any idea how to separate them? They seem very as-a-unit."

"Yes, they communicate by mindlink. I have an incapacitating net if we could weaken one. The one has taken significant damage

Ego attempts to jury rig the circlet to overload and distract their connection in an opportune moment. She is feeling confident... and that's when four distinct laser blasts of energy zip near. Three miss big a good bit, but the fourth goes *narrowly* between her legs, so close she can feel the heat.

Darnit and Hrothulf can see that these blasts are coming from shoulder cannons on the dagger. Darnit can tell that these aren't strategic shots, but are almost random. Like they're clearly not all shooting at the same target.

One of the lasers hits a butte, and a couple rocks drip off and down and as though liquified.

Izar sees that in the direction they are heading, there's a storm brewing. This time of year those storms are generally flash-floody with big downpours and tons of lightning.

Nilchi swoops in, making it to Darnit. He tells Poyraz, "You'll have to toss me!" and the griffins, having played this game before, with ease toss the dwarf. The dwarf lands and Nilchi does a bit of a turbulent move catching, and they now ride side by side.

Hrothulf fires at the nearest and lands his shot critically, in the fuel of the jetpack. Poyraz looks back and gives a nod, impressed. The explosion sends a smoke-plume of a droid zipping straight to the ground. In pursuit, it doesn't take long for Poyraz to get right above where a Wiley-Coyote puff of smoke rises from the ground.

Ego: well that was an unexpected turn, Ego says

Dorinda: i think they can track us thermally, I'm going up really high to cool off before going to pick that assassin up

Ego: sounds good. I'll prepare to disrupt their link as well as I'm able

Darnit fires *Magic Missile* at the jetpacks of the front three then immediately flees away in the opposite direction. The *Magic Missiles* each hit, but just like before it's like they don't even flinch.

Darnit flees directly south.

Hrothulf turns to see that the three remaining continue in their formation pursuit. Hrothulf loops around to take another shot.

Hrothulf and Ego both see as the droids switch tactics, each launching a rocket, and the three rockets come out and explode into several more flechette rockets that explode into more still, spreading their fire in a massive string of explosions in an 80-ft diameter sphere. Much as you'd see when a ship is chased by a missile and they do their chaff, but as an offensive maneuver. But Sefarina is far above it all. At which point they then spread out their formation and slow down a little.

Ego screams, doing her worst to disrupt the Dagger's communication mindlink, the chaotic pulses of the Slaad mind going forth. She knows it works, and that if she hit the right frequency they would have heard it, but they're giving no indication even if it is working, much like their non-response to physical hits. But she's pretty sure it has to have worked.

Izar sees Visparo moving to higher ground, as the hut he was in is in a channel. Dhund Hal Ka is at his side, carrying a very large backpack. Our ship is there as well. They and Izar are already being rained on from the storm.

Izar lands on the high ground where they're running to, where there's a ledge and a cave. They make their way up to him and Visparo greets in his usual way. And Dhund Hal Ka says, "And the rest of the Branch?" Izar recounts the happenings, and why we are dispersed and not out of trouble.

Izar asks if he can make lightning? Or call all the griffins to himself and make them go faster?
To the second, "Yes".

But to be clear... Are you asking me to join the branch?

Um. Yes? I don't feel that I have the authority to bequest the title... but yes... for our purposes right now, you can be part of the branch. Do you understand the quest?

This is an honor that I humbly accept again.

You were part of the branch before?

And I shall not fail this time.

You were part of a failing branch? Oh boy. They're going to kill me. If they all survive.

And she pulls off a whistle that seems to be made of bone and in the flash of a lightning crash you see that it seems to have been carved from an old griffin talon. She blows it and it doesn't make a sound, and she said, "They should be here shortly."

Immediately all astride a griffin each personally have a strong sense that the griffin must stop what they're doing and go in a certain direction right away. Not compelled, but a strong sense for griffins and riders that we have to go. Each has a sense that they *should* go, and that if they do go they will be able to travel at four times their normal speed.

Darnit and Hrothulf take the speed boost, changing direction right away to where they are being hailed. Within seconds Darnit and Nilchi are landing at the cave, and Nilchi instinctively stretches the opening of the cave with his rock forming ability to make room for everybody. Shortly after that Hrothulf and Poyraz arrive. A couple seconds after that, Ego and Dorinda do *not* arrive. But it's only been like fifteen seconds.

Dorinda says to Ego: we will go after we pick up that Dagger

The find the fallen Dagger who is unconscious but alive and dorinda immediately ensnares her in a glowing green net

While waiting, Izar gives a little branch interview.

Well, I am the captain of the griffin cavalry. I... am not interested in branch management. I understand that the branch by its nature extends itself. And sometimes that is through grafting, and sometimes through being on call, as it were. I am here for the branch, and I am very interested in the lifeform you have on your ship.

Ooohhh no. [...]

[more]

Dhund Hal Ka also reveals that the lizard Teresias was her Teresias before.

I am a reformed paladin of Gliten and I have understood that I was too focused on a narrow version of balance and I'm interested in learning to extend my understanding of true balance.

Where are your other two friends?

I don't know I really thought they'd be here by now.

They should be here by now.

What if they rejected the whistle?

That's definitely a possibility...

Cliffhanger! And what's in the backpack?!