

The Prototype
Saijo Sector
40 ABY

Mirai was dead.

*"Spicey-o, Jacky-o
Rise her up from down below
Spicey, spicey, spicey-o,
Up aloft this yard must go,
Jack rise her up from down below!"*

The fleet was on the brink of defeat with its metaphorical back against the wall. The asteroid belt was as much a deterrent for the Taldryan Republic Navy as a slightly smelly bantha was to a hungry rancor. Flame-coloured Decimators swarmed around her fleet, preventing any meaningful escape whilst reinforcements for the enemy arrived.

Mirai was dead.

*"Now spice is the life of man,
Always was since the trade began."*

*"Now spice gave me a broken nose,
And spice made me pawn me clothes!"*

Saijo had slipped through her clutches. Her throne-to-be was now her throne-never-to-be. Her Pirate army retreated, was defeated, and severely lowered in number. This was a hard lesson that no matter the numbers, nothing topped strategy and training in the field of battle. Absolutely nothing.

And yet, Mirai was dead.

*"Now spice is the life of man,
Spice from that little tin can."*

*I thought I heard the first mate say,
I treats me crew in a decent way."*

*A smoker of spice all around,
And a spice package for the runner man!"*

Fennyl smashed her bottle of rum on the floor. "WILL YOU ALL SHUT UP!"

The noisy shanty from her pirates ceased immediately, leaving her to think about the one person who meant more to her than any other. She couldn't focus on anything else. Ever since she'd been told what had happened, the words had rung through her head again, and again, and again. She refused to cry, instead driving that grief into the pit of her gut until it lit up in a primal fury. She played the recording again. Taldryan were the types to brag about Mirai's death at the hands of some ugly-looking frakker with a glowstick.

She should have expected no less from them.

It wasn't just that either. Yugat's drones relayed everything that had gone down on the planet's surface. Taldryan was more efficient than she was told. Either Genko was wrong in his assessment of their capabilities, or this was a setup. She couldn't say Plan B had gone up in smoke, because that was the *point*. The bombs were meant to set the Saijo City's ablaze in a maelstrom worthy of being recorded and shared with her enemies, a lesson to anyone who dared deny her. Yet, just like everything else today, it had failed. Taldryan was one step ahead of her each time.

Her face seemed permanently etched in place, like artwork frozen in time. Her teeth were clenched, and her eyes were wide open, pupils dilated. She dug her fingernails into the palm of her hands so hard that she drew blood. Everything had gone to Hell so quickly.

"Ma'am, your subordinate, Yugat, has arrived on board."

The officer spoke with such beautiful, Imperial clarity. The accent ground on her ears and made her rage swell within her.

"Your..." the officer feigned a cough. "*Army and Fleet*, await further instruction. What remains of it, that is."

Fennyl's head immediately snapped to the officer, her face adopting a faint smile.

"You," Fennyl stroked a couple of fingers down the Lieutenant's cheek, yet she stood firm and defiant. "I like you. What's your name?"

"Lieutenant Jennifer Gre--"

Fennyl sliced her throat with a vibroknife. The last thing Jennifer saw was eyes seeped in malice as her life seeped away into a puddle on the floor.

"Shame. So young and so full of potential too," Fennyl wiped the vibroknife clean with her thumb. "Anyone else feel like being a smartass?"

As if to emphasise her point, the Pirates in the Observation Deck with her pointed their blasters at the few Imperial aids on board the vessel.

The durasteel blast doors opened, allowing Yugat entrance inside.

"Mirai is dead," Fennyl said, shaking as she said the words. "He's frakking dead!"

Yugat paused for a moment. **"He was a good kid."**

"He wasn't just good," Fennyl said. "He was the best, God damn it!"

Fennyl slammed her fists on a nearby control panel, not caring in the slightest what they did or what they were for. She seethed, hissing like a Correlian viper. Taldryan fancied themselves as a Republic that helped the weak and less fortunate, did they? It would be their undoing.

"Ma'am, we will be in range of Saijo within one minute. What are your orders?"

The entire observation deck looked at Fennyl as her lips curved into a malicious grin. Yugat gave a small nod back at her like he knew what she was thinking. If she couldn't have Saijo, then no-one could. She gave the order.

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Saijo Sector
The Leviathan
40 ABY

"Admiral! We just received a report from the Axios!"

Zruta knew it was too good to be true. The young officer's demeanour told him everything. *Something* was wrong.

Regardless, Zruta was a man built with a confidence that aligned with his years of service. "What's the situation?"

"They've picked up a signal on the Ascendant Sensor Suite, a massive signal over Saijo!"

Zruta checked the map readings over Saijo. A bead of sweat dropped from his aged brow. What in the seven Corellian Hells were the Children of Mortis doing here? Why here? Why now? It didn't make any sense...

It all became clear when a large, cylindrical-shaped vessel uncloaked itself, blotting out the sun.

"What... the hell is *that*?" Zruta asked. It seemed the Supreme Chancellor was right to be concerned.

The structure was the size of several Imperial Star Destroyers, and it was pointed towards Saijo. The Taldryan Navy had fallen for it. They followed the Pirate Fleet away from Saijo, giving the superweapon all the breathing room it needed to unleash devastation upon the planet below. The Launch Tube lit up a crimson-red, before a laser fired through the Saijo atmosphere.

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Saijo

Central Islands

40 ABY

No-one realised what had happened until it was too late.

The sun shone in the sky above the *Battle of Saijo* on a clear, bloody day. Taldryan were winning against the Saijo Pirates, outnumbering, outmanoeuvring, and decimating the enemy. The Pirate's began to retreat, and celebrations began amongst the Saijo populace.

Celebrations that were cut short.

A shadow appeared over the islands, and whilst clouds were definitely not uncommon, there had been clear blue skies up to that point of the day. Those who looked up were privy to the sight of a behemoth blotting out the sun. Children asked their unsure parents what it was. Saijo officials, backed by the Taldryan Republic, tried to ease the hearts and minds of the public.

The lazer struck the central island. It tore through the forcefield like it was made of paper and struck the temple within it. First, there was silence, then a bright light, then a deafening thunderclap that could be heard for miles. The ground shook from the explosion, a mushroom cloud made of fire and ash rising hundreds of feet into the

air. The shockwaves created large tidal waves that struck the surrounding islands and cities, killing thousands upon thousands of people.

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Fennyl watched the destruction below with a wide, toothy smile on her face.

"More, more MORE!" she said. "I want nothing left of Saijo by the time we are done!"

Mirai's blood would be paid tenfold. She would make sure of that.

"We... can't," an officer stated to her, his voice quaking as he spoke. "The crystal wasn't at full power a moment ago, and... and... we used what we had in reserve. It takes time to charge."

"Then you can't stay."

Fennyl seethed at the order directed at her. From her *subordinate*, no less.

"What?" She asked.

"This will be their next target. You can't stay here. The ship I arrived on has a cloaking device. You can use it to get through the fighting and back to the Red Sun."

Fennyl squared up to him, and Yugat tensed. "And what if I want to? You don't get to tell me what to do, Yugat. You hear me!? I am *not* in the mood for this crap! It's not my fault you were such a damn disappointment down there!"

"I defeated their Supreme Chancellor."

"Oh? Is he dead?"

"Well... no..."

"Well, that's a fat load of good that's done! You better do better or I'll have you fed to the Exogorth in the asteroid field! You hear me, Yugat!"

Silence filled the Observation Deck. None of the Pirates had ever seen Fennyl snap at Yugat like that.

Yugat nodded his head. **"Yes. Understood..."**

Fennyl took a deep breath, furrowing her brow. She placed a hand on her forehead. "I'm giving you another chance. Stay here and defend the weapon. Kill anyone who comes on board."

"Of course."

Fennyl turned her back on him and walked away. She glanced over her shoulder. "If you see the crazy bastard that killed Mirai, bring me his head, preferably on a pike."

"I will."

"And Yugat?" Fennyl stopped just outside the durasteel blast doors, her eyes focusing on him. "I'll be watching."

The doors closed, and Yugat glanced around, seeing that all eyes were on him. He felt Fennyl's presence heading towards the hangar.

"What are you all looking at? Get back to work!"

The crew went back to their duties whilst Yugat isolated himself in a separate room. Meditation was in order for when Taldryan came knocking on his door.