

# ONE

Balo climbed through of the opening in the wall. She was forbidden this, but she didn't care much for that. The sky above was much more beautiful at night than it was in the daytime. And as long as her caregivers were asleep anyway, they didn't need to know. They had spoken to her of many dangers out there in the dark, but Balo had never seen anything. She was convinced they were just tales to keep the little ones inside at night.

She walked away from the place she called home, until she was a good 20 lengths from it. She sat down in her favorite spot, and turned her eyes skyward. The large light that lightened the daytime was gone, as always, but the lights that sometimes illuminated the night were gone as well today. This was good, as usually it overpowered the little pinpricks all around here. And she did like to watch those.

She didn't know how many there were. Of course a decent system for counting would have helped, but Balo's species hadn't evolved that far yet. All she knew was that there were many, many more than there were of her kind in the village.

Sometimes she dreamed. She wondered if it would be possible to leave her home, and visit these pinpricks of light. How far away were they anyway? Not knowing didn't bother her, but her curiosity bothered others. She'd asked the elders about it, and they hadn't answered here. One even just yelled at her, told her to stop making up lies. They did not understand.

As her eyes crossed the sky, taking in the immensity of the stars, she suddenly stopped moving and stared ate one of the stars. She tried to remember last night, and the night before. She wasn't certain, but she was sure there was an extra light there. One that was not there the night before.

Lost in wonder, her sensitive ears, attuned to picking up any sounds that indicated danger, failed to do their job this time. A loud crack very close to her snapped Bola out of her thoughts. Her instincts kicked in, and she quickly moved away from the sound. She dived under an overhanging rock, and rolled up into a ball, slowing her breathing down to almost none. This, unfortunately, was the only defense her kind had. She glanced through the slits of her eyes at the place she'd been sitting only a few moments ago. A large creature now stood there. A strange creature it was indeed. It stood upright on two hind legs, as did some of the predatory creatures she had seen. The color of this creature was unknown to her. It seemed to be without fur, which is something Bola had never seen before. Most definitely, it was not of her kind. Or any kind she knew.

It also didn't travel alone, as it was soon joined by others. They uttered sounds, but Bola didn't know what they meant. They sounded nothing like anything she ever heard before. One of the creatures raised its fore-legs into the air, while the other looked away from it. At least she thought he did, she could not see the head. She wondered if it was actually the creature's head, or if there was an actual head underneath what she saw. She knew the elders sometimes put objects on their heads at official gatherings to appear more important. Perhaps that was the case here as well.

One of the creatures pointed roughly in her direction. Then she heard a loud noise, and somethin green lit up the night. The green light smashed into the ground a little distance from her hiding place,

and Bola could smell something. She didn't know exactly what she smelled, but she knew what the smell represented. The last time she had smelled it, the whole village moved. Their old home had disappeared in fire then. Bola's instinct kicked in, and she started to run.

## TWO

When Bola woke up, she immediately knew something was wrong. She was lying down, but this did not feel like the soil of her home. It didn't even feel like soil. It was cold, and hard, and very smooth. She opened her eyes, and looked around her. Fear struck into her as she took in the unfamiliar surroundings. There was nothing in this space at all. Just her on a flat piece of ground with high walls on all sides. Nothing to hide under, nothing to hold on to. So her caregivers had been right after all. There were untold dangers in the night.

How long she sat there, Bola did not know. The passing of time was not something her kind had yet grasped. And as the lights in the sky could not be seen from here, she had nothing to go on. A slight sensation had slowly started to grow inside her, and she knew the feeling. She required food. Normally this wasn't a problem. Food was all around them, all you had to do was look for it. But there was no food here.

She heard a strange noise and turned in the direction it had come from. Part of one of the walls had disappeared, and one of the creatures she had seen before was standing there. Bola tensed her muscles. As the creature stepped towards her, she dashed for it. If there was one thing her species had, it was lightning reflexes, and speed. In a flash, she had dashed between the creature's hind legs and out. Unfortunately this didn't help much, as the surroundings outside were just as strange as inside. Flat and shiny, without any hiding places. So Bola did the only thing she knew to do. She ran for it.

She heard loud noises behind her. They reminded her of a predator on the hunt. And so she ran even faster. There were a lot of creatures here. They had similarities, she noted, but they were all different colors. Some got out of her way, some she had to go around. Bola ran as she had never run before.

She did not know how long she'd been running. She didn't know about time, so 'how long' had no meaning for her. She did know, out of instinct, she could not keep running. Especially not when the time of feeding was upon her. But these unfamiliar surroundings had no places where she could hide. In the forest, you never needed to look long. There was always a small tree, or a bush, that you kind hide under. A hole in the ground, between rocks, or a tree. Here, there was absolutely nothing. Has Bola known what panic was, she probably would have realized that panic was starting to grow on her. As it is, all she knew was an unknown feeling she couldn't place.

Before her, another piece of wall disappeared. She realized the sound she had heard earlier was created by the disappearing walls. She ran for the opening, and just after passing it she heard the sound again. With the closing of the wall, the light had disappeared too, and Bola was surrounded by

darkness. She stopped running, and looked around her. Usually her kind could see rather well in the dark, needing only a small amount of light, but even that was withheld. There was no light here at all. Bola relaxed a bit. There may not have been light, but at least the creatures that were hunting for her were not here either.

Her time of reprieve did not last long, as she felt something, and then the wall before her opened up again. Light from the outside flooded the confined area she was in, and without a second thought Bola ran again. Looking around, she noticed how different this forest was to the one she had just come from. Here, there was not just one flat ground, here, there were lots of things she could hide under. She ran for one of them. She heard noises from the creatures that were swarming this place, but she didn't bother with the noises. She'd spotted a dark spot underneath one of the strange bushes, and went for it.

Just before she reached it, she felt a strange sensation go through her. She felt her limbs lose contact with the ground. They were still running, but she was moving in the wrong direction. Instead of forward, she was going up, the distance between her and her chosen hiding spot growing larger instead of smaller. As she looked, she saw a creature stand before her. It was as dark as the night when the stars had not been visible at all. He was different from all the other creatures she'd seen. She heard a cracking sound. It was like the sound she heard as her caregivers had cracked the bones of their food to get at the marrow. She did not hear the dull thud as her body hit the floor.

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For a moment, the Dark Lord of the Sith looked at the creature that lay on the deck of his Star Destroyer. A small critter, something he'd never seen before. He suspected one of the stormtroopers had brought it aboard from the planet below. Unacceptable behavior. He would have liked to deal with this trooper, but there were more pressing matters at hand. In the distance, he could see the shape of Empire's new battle station. He would not allow this one to be destroyed by the Rebels as its predecessor had been. Below him was the forest moon. For a moment he wondered how many unknown species were down there. He wondered if they could be a threat to him and his Master. A moment later he dismissed the thought. There was only one who could be a threat. And that one was on his way here. The Tyderian shuttle that had just gone down to the surface had brought him. Of this, the Sith Lord was sure.