

The Farewell

By Tony “Thunder” Klepack

The *Lokos* thundered through the interdimensional hell that was Hyperspace, slicing along like a blade through soft flesh.

Fury manipulated the various keypads before him, making certain everything was functioning according within its designated parameters. He controlled the vessel from the automation circuitry routed through the helm station. It was more work than if the ship had a full crew compliment but given his current predicament a necessary evil.

The bridge was silent, save for his occasional movements. None of the usual prattle he associated with his Renegade brethren. No quips from Pathfinder. No inspirational sayings by Thunderbolt. No stern condemnation from Magma for disobeying his edicts.

He enjoyed the quiet. It was peaceful in a way. If peace was something he was capable of achieving any more. Frankly, after all that had happened, he didn't know anymore...

He wasn't exactly sure why he'd taken the ship. Partly, he was angry at being excluded from the mission to Zechra-tor. The nerve of Magma to exclude *him* of all the Renegades! He'd half planned to take the gunship there anyway, just to defy their esteemed leader.

But no. If Magma was so sure he could deal with the dangers of the mission without Fury's help, fine. The hell with him!

The hell with all of them...

He'd also considered taking the *Lokos* and leaving the Renegades for good. For a few moments, the idea had made sense to him and he was certain he would do it.

Truth be told, he didn't know what he was going to do. There was a certain appeal to leaving it all behind. But then again, where would he go and what would he do on his own? He'd been made to fight. He knew nothing else and, devoid of his group, how could he hope to combat the Empire effectively.

Still, could he tolerate the annoyances of his brethren any longer? They were so simplistic and annoying—joking among themselves, concerning themselves with banality. They didn't live for the thrill of combat like he and Venom had. They could fight, of course, but they didn't truly possess cores of fire. Didn't live to reign down judgement on their enemy.

The only thing he did know for sure was that he wanted to be alone for a while and think things over. Away from the patronizing or oblivious personalities of his comrades.

Maybe with some time he could make sense of the mess that his life had become...

Fury watched as the *Lokos* leapt from Hyperspace, arriving above the world called Kal XVII on his star charts.

He'd selected the destination at random. According to the ship database the planet was bristling with primitive organic life and vegetation, emerging relatively recently from the primordial stardust and settling down into a living, breathing thing. No intelligent life had yet developed here nor had any settled on it.

That was perfect. He didn't want company.

He tapped at the keypad before him, ordering the ship to descend.

* * *

Fury stepped off the gunship's ramp and sucked in a breath of the atmosphere, savoring its unique aroma. His internal sensors determined what he already knew: the compounds in the

air about him were perfectly safe to his kind. Additionally, he appreciated the pureness of it all after spending so much time aboard the *Lokos* to get here in the first place.

Of course Destara didn't really breath air like organic organisms did. Their breathing was an approximation to satisfy the flesh creatures they interacted with. They could function perfectly fine in vacuum if required. As long as the atmosphere wasn't corrosive in some fashion it was largely irrelevant.

He moved out from under the large vessel, materializing a device in his hand as he did. He pointed the gadget behind him at the ship and thumbed a button. A slight hum was the only indication the ship's perimeter force field had been engaged.

It wasn't likely anybody could steal the ship from him here since there had been no intelligent life detected as he'd approached. But he didn't want to take any chances all the same. Even if a curious beast decided to crawl inside the ship while he was out exploring it could be potentially messy extracting it.

He dematerialized the device again, giving the matter no further thought. He turned instead to explore the alien landscape.

There was a kaleidoscope of colors, smell and sounds here. The world was technically uninhabited but clearly alive in its own way. The nearby jungle was rife with the roars, howls and calls of primitive animal life going about its daily activities, completely oblivious to his presence.

There was so much life and beauty here. It was chaos but also ordered in its own way. Like a canvas some great force had concocted with great care, lovingly making certain each flower, tree and beast was just so.

In the moment, it all made sense. Everything in the Universe did. There was no mistaking the feeling.

Then it was broken. A stray thought entered his mind and he was reminded of the horrors of the Universe. Of pain, terror—

Death.

How could it be so beautiful and so cruel? Why had he survived to live and tell the tale while Venom had not. Why not him instead? Why had the Universe seen fit to let Venom die after so little time alive? He'd barely had any time! Never been given the chance to explore the wonders of the world around him. Never had time to truly live.

It's not fair!

Without truly thinking, he broke into a sprint.

He charged savagely along the nearby beach. Emerald waves crashed against the barren shore as he moved, adding to the noise of nature about him.

He ran and ran.

He was aware of the passage of time as he moved. He was some distance from the ship now but that didn't matter. Nothing did.

He found his path taking him through the immediate area, traversing the jungle-like vegetation, dodging errant tree roots and orphaned boulders as he moved.

It was exhilarating. He pushed himself to his physical limits, trying with all his might to work out his frustrations through sheer physical exertion. A greater mind might have believed it futile but he didn't know what else to do. The pain in his heart was too great and he found himself motivated to act, to move, to do something—anything—to make it stop.

He traveled up an incline, maneuvering a twisting, winding path as he did, powering along as fast as he could. Finally, he reached the apex of his pathway: a high jagged cliff edge

overlooking the jungle below.

He stopped a moment, taking in the chaotic jungle-scape beyond. The green, red and yellow vegetation stretched into the horizon, seemingly going on forever all around him, broken by the odd lake or clearing.

Somewhere a beast was howling its dominance over its fellows. Elsewhere, birds chirped their birdsong oblivious to either beast or himself as he perched above it all. Life found a way. It always did.

He listened a second longer then howled savagely into the distance. A flock of birds scattered out of the trees at the sound.

He didn't know why he did it—simply to answer the beast perhaps. To celebrate the life around him. To curse the cruel Universe that brought him to this place and point in his life. Perhaps it was for all of that...

He threw himself off the cliff then, feeling the rush of the air as he sliced through it uninhibited by any counter force.

At the last, he reconfigured his body into his chopper mode and blasted his afterburners, thrusting him back skyward before he powered his rotors and stabilized himself.

He soared through the yellow skies a while, just reveling in the sensation of weightlessness. He fired his afterburners again, tearing forward uncontrollably unimpeded by anything.

He felt free in the moment, forgetting his troubles as he maneuvered deftly through the scant orange clouds. He dipped once earthward, skimming a swamp clearing and scattering a group of reptiles before ascending.

He spiraled about several times in the air losing himself in the sensation as he went. He could go anywhere in the atmosphere he chose. He wasn't limited by a ground mode like Magma or Pathfinder. It was a freedom he cherished...

He soared about the sky for several more minutes, twisting, turning and diving as he desired. Each moment unencumbered by guilt or confusion. He was free to be whatever he felt.

Finally, inevitably, he'd had his fill and he dropped to the earth once more, coming to a hover just above the surface before converting back into his humanoid mode.

There was a wide, deep jade pool nearby and he felt himself drawn to its pristine clear surface. He watched the gentle ripples as they moved across it slightly distorting his reflection.

There was a breeze moving the water about and caressing his red-white armored body. It felt good he realized. This place was peaceful, calm. As if reflecting his very spirit at that instant...

Below him, he observed his image in the glimmering surface. The face staring back at him was the face of his brother. It was the only place he'd ever see it again he realized belatedly.

He stretched his fingers into the water as if to grasp the image, to capture it for safe keeping. But as he brought his palm back, there was nothing there but rapidly escaping micro-streams of fluid spilling back.

He rose.

“So, this is it then,” he whispered. “The final requiem—”

Something crashed into him then, ruining his introspection with savage finality as he was propelled into the pool face-first.

There was no time to react as he was pinned by something with great mass. Five enormous digits gripped his head, holding it down in the pool. He tried to dislodge it to no avail.

His attacker was powerful, relentless.

He was helpless.

He continued to struggle against its grip but it seemed futile. He ceased his movements finally, calming himself as best he could.

The beast held him under yet took no more action to dismember or deactivate him. The realization came finally that the animal was futilely attempting to drown him! Obviously it couldn't realize he didn't need to breathe to survive like its other prey would.

He was still immobilized for all intent and purpose though. He considered his options. Could he play dead, he wondered, or should he try something more pro-active.

He concentrated and his form began to shift and reconfigure itself, gaining mass. The beast couldn't have known what he was capable of as a Destara. It was thrown clear of him as he finished changing into his helicopter form.

He powered his rotors, hoping to take flight and escape the creature before it thought to retaliate.

The creature was quicker than expected, leaping at him once again attempting to reassert its dominance. Its trajectory brought it right into his spinning blades where it was torn to shreds. Blood, fur and bits of the beast landed everywhere.

Ruefully, he converted back into his humanoid form, emerging from the now reddening pool. The pristine water had been spoiled by the animal carcass. Its pulped remains strewn all about.

He heard the foliage nearby and glanced up in time to see a group of the beasts emerge from the tree-line. Instinctively, he summoned up one sword and gun from the pocket dimension they were stored in.

The lead beast roared and thrashed at its chest. About him, the others followed suite. Was this one their leader? Or had he just killed that one in the pool? It didn't matter. Hierarchy was irrelevant now. Only survival mattered.

He raised his gun skyward, squeezing off several shots. The bullets thundered out the barrel.

The beasts remained where they were. He'd given them pause but they didn't seem keen on backing down.

He studied his opponents. They were not unlike large simians except they possessed four arms instead of two. The bottom of their torso branched backward into six segmented legs like an insect. Each of them leered at him with silver pupil-less eyes.

They were acting on instinct. Responding to a threat that killed one of their number. He didn't need to fight them but he wasn't sure if he'd have any choice.

And then it was over. The stalemate resolved.

In an instant they charged him en masse. They were impossibly quick despite their size.

He stood his ground, discharging his armor piercing rifle into their midst. Several fell from his barrage, their momentum carrying them right into a bloody hail of death.

Three escaped his assault. One charged him from the left and he dodged clumsily, managing to avoid its strike. He slashed at it with his blade as it turned to attack again. The steel puncturing it diagonally from shoulder to waist.

The other two tackled him then. Their bodies crushing him against the rough soil of the jungle floor. His weapons flew away on impact, each to either side of their tangled mass.

He rose swiftly, striking the nearest beast with his fist. It dropped backward, clearly

stunned by his blow.

He moved for his sword. It was ever so slightly closer to his location than the rifle and he hoped he could use it to his advantage.

The second beast moved quicker, slamming itself into his legs and toppling him again. His face struck the compact dirt of the jungle. The beast pinned his upper arms down with two of its hands while several of its legs kept him from moving to free himself.

Its two free fists smashed against the back of his head module. He felt his optic sensors blur for an instant before returning to normal. His head swam with numbness from the blow.

It struck again. Then again.

He couldn't focus from the onslaught. There was no time to—

A hiss filled the air once then again and again. Abruptly the creature stopped then its weight shifted from his back and legs. He could move again.

He turned around and searched out the other beast. It was wavering on its feet nearby, three precise openings in its chest gushed red. It whimpered as it realized it was dying then abruptly collapsed.

"I thought you might need a hand," a familiar voice said nearby.

Fury turned and saw an unexpected sight: himself in crimson and white.

"Venom!" he gasped.

He couldn't believe his optic sensors. How was it possible. Had the seething vitriol within finally driven away his sanity.

It wasn't real! It couldn't be. This was all in his mind—that was the only sane conclusion.

Carefully, cautiously, Fury moved his hand out toward Venom. He half expected the image of his dead brother to ripple and vanish when his fingers contacted it. He was shocked when they touched solid steel instead.

"I'm real," Venom confirmed.

He studied Fury's shocked expression then grinned and moved in, wrapping his arms about his body and bringing him close.

Fury grasped for words, managing "B-but *how?!?*"

"The Tetrix, Fury. It brought me back to have a chance for you to say goodbye."

"But Magma is light years away from here. How—"

"Distance is meaningless to it," the other answered. "Before he claimed it, it called to him in dreams, through visions over much further than this."

Fury nodded. "Why now? Why here?"

Venom looked wistful.

"You're all alone here," he said. "You need to let go of your pain or it will consume you."

Fury sat atop a large boulder nearby.

There was a resonance to his words he knew. All he'd known in his short life was pain. Anger at his friends—they didn't understand him or his need to act as he did. Anger at the Destara Empire...indignation over their subjugation of the weaker organic species. Guilt over his failure to save Venom before Draxx Starr took him...

"I think you may be right." He sighed. "Every time I go into a fight now I just think of gaining revenge. Punishing whoever I'm fighting. It's almost like I've forgotten the cause completely. Only revenge matters."

Venom crossed his legs and eased onto the soil beside him.

"But you already got revenge. Right after Draxx Starr ended my life you finished him

off.”

He grinned. “Thanks by the way.”

“It had to be done. I needed to settle the score. Make things right in my book—or as right as I could given the circumstances.”

“You rid the universe of an evil dictator,” Venom told him. “It cost you but you did the right thing eliminating him. He had a great deal of blood on his hands. But he’s gone now. You don’t have to keep fighting for my memory.”

Fury gazed at him. “Then what am I fighting for?”

“Justice.” Venom met his stare. “To answer for all those slaves who’ve died over the millennia—and for all of those who are still out there toiling in Imperial territory, working themselves to death to satiate Deceptar’s lust for power. They need someone to give them hope. Someone to fight for them. I’ve been avenged, Fury. But what about all those innocents out there.”

He considered his brother’s words.

“That’s a tall order...”

“You’re not alone. You never have been.” Venom almost seemed to light up as he spoke. “Magma, Thunderbolt—all the others. They care for you as much as I do. I don’t think I ever truly realized it when I was alive but they do. Together, you’re a family. Working together, you can do the impossible. You can make titans yield if you take a mind to it.”

Fury found himself smiling at that. There was something reassuring about the grand scheme of things when Venom put it so plainly. They were symbols of something better, something nobler. They were proof their kind were not irredeemable. Proof they could live with the other species in peace.

More than that, they were the only ones who could stop Deceptar and his Empire. They could put right all the wrongs the Destara had done.

“Thank you,” he said.

Venom grinned. “What are brothers for?”

The two of them sat quietly for a few minutes, taking in the beauty of the surrounding jungle. The warmth of Kal VII’s star on their synth-skin and the touch of the breeze against their armor.

“It’s too bad Magma and the others chose Haven instead of a place like this. Of course, I suppose no one would get anything done here,” Venom said casually.

“You’re probably right,” he agreed. “Add to that, we’d be walking targets here if the Empire ever buzzed by.”

They were silent again for a while then Fury asked: “so, what’s it like to be dead? Do you—are you aware of anything?”

Venom continued looking at the emerald lake before them. Slowly, he shook his head. “No,” he answered. “Not exactly. I recall nothing...coherent. Just a sense of, I don’t know how to describe it—an overwhelming feeling of unity. Like I am a part of all things now. Like... something greater than an individual.”

He glanced at Fury.

“I know—that doesn’t really make any sense, does it.”

Fury shrugged.

“I can’t pretend I understand everything about the universe,” he replied. “Perhaps it does. I don’t know...”

He paused.

“And what about after this? You’ll be—”

“Dead,” Venom confirmed. “For good. There won’t be any more reasons for me to come back.”

Fury gazed at him, searching to find the right words...

“It’s not fair!” he exclaimed. “Why can’t it bring you back for good? Obviously its got the power to do that.”

“It does. But it was created to destroy Deceptar specifically not revive the dead. If it uses its power to do that instead, he will live on. Billions have perished because of his quest for power, Fury. If he isn’t stopped permanently then billions more will suffer.”

“Why can’t it spare just *one* life?”

“Why is my life more important then any others who have perished?” Venom rested his hand on his brother’s shoulder. “I lived, however briefly, and then I died. I’ve made my peace with that. You need to too. You can’t let the past hamper your ability to live in the now.”

“It just...” he drifted off, defeated.

“I know. Believe me, I do. But life isn’t always fair,” Venom said. “Sometimes you just have to deal with the hand you’re dealt.”

He gazed off at the jade pool beyond.

“At least you’ve gotten a chance to say goodbye,” he added. “Let’s not waste this chance...”

Fury looked into his eyes and found himself slowly nodding.

“You’re right. As usual.”

Venom gazed about. “This is a beautiful place...lets check out some of the sights. Maybe we can make some new memories together.”

He moved off and converted into his tank form. He raced off into the nearby undergrowth.

Fury shrugged. He leapt into the sky and converted into his chopper mode, following after his brother.

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