

## Ember and the Temple

Written by Cecilia Ayres

Ember Rithien glanced around the dark room again, careful not to show even an *inch* of her face from underneath the grey hood of her heavy cloak, only allowing her silver hair to flow from the heavy folds. She had been waiting in this dirty “restaurant” for too long.

Hopping down from her perch on one of the many dust crusted stools, she started to scan the room again, but this time, was interrupted by a loud buzzing coming from her wrist watch. *Incoming call: Unknown number.*

“Huh,” Ember muttered to herself, “Must be a new client, better answer, I could make some good money from this job.”

She lifted the watch to her mouth and murmured, “Hello, this is Rithien.”

“Colossal Industries.” A rough voice replied on the other end, there was the light sound of rustling papers before he spoke again. “I’ve heard that you were the greatest thief in this galaxy.”

“Not *were*.” She hissed. “*Are*. Tell me what you want before I hang up. I have plenty of other clients that I could be talking to.”

“Look. I need you to get me a sword that is placed in one of the ancient space Temples that litter this sector of the universe.” He paused, as if searching for a way to please her. To trick Ember into working with him, for she did not job without giving anyone trouble beforehand. “I’ll give you five thousand gold if you do this.”

“Make that ten thousand and I can get it to you today.” Ember growled back.

“Deal. You sure you can do it that quick though? You’re just a lit-”

She snarled softly, baring her teeth, which caused him to shut his mouth in an instant. “Do not finish that sentence. I’ve been training to kill aliens like you every day of my eighteen-year life.”

“I’ll send you the location of Colossal Industries as soon as possible.” And with that, Ember ended the call.

*I should get out of here.* She thought to herself, placing an ivory hand on the belt that held one of her many black serrated hunting blades as she walked by staring aliens. That simple gesture sent an obvious message to everyone that she passed. *Don’t mess with me.*

Unsurprisingly, no one did, they only stepped out of her way to create a clear path to the front doors, some bowing their heads as Ember made her way into her ship, an old *Firebird* model that she had stolen years back.

Ember slid into the worn leather chair, flipped a few switches, and it shot into space.

“Welcome back, Assassin.” The computer’s silken voice soothed her, it’s silken voice filling Ember’s head as if it was thick milk pooling in the bottom of a crystal bowl. “Where are we headed to now?”

“The smallest of the space Temples. It should contain one of the swords that were bled upon in the War.” Ember tilted the silver wheel slightly and her ship shifted away from a piece of space debris. “We have to go home first though.”

“Do not waste your time.” The computer replied. “You promised that you would get it to Colossal Industries before the day’s end.”

“Set course for the Temple, then.” Ember sighed. “I guess we’ll just have to go with what’s in my ship.”

“You have plenty of weapons to play with.” The ship’s gentle voice was laced with quiet laughter as it started to show holograms and of each sword, knife and blaster that was placed in the back.

It might seem odd, that the greatest assassin had leisurely talks with her ship, it really isn’t. You see, being an assassin doesn’t earn you many friends, and even if Ember had been a normal alien, she hated the company of others, only making an exception for her ship.

“Ember,” The tentative voice of her computer once again filled the pod. “We have arrived at the Temple.”

“Thanks, old friend. I can take it in from here, it looks there’s a rather flat landing spot over that teal rock.”

“Of course, Rithien.” And with that, the ship shifted fully into Ember’s control.

Ember’s *Firebird* landed, without any sound. The only evidence that it had touched the ground was a huge cloud of sparkling seafoam dust that floated up and stayed suspended in the air that seemed to be at a great abundance on this tiny planet.

Quickly crawling into the back section of her ship, Ember selected two swords, which she then strapped onto her back, and a blaster which she slipped into her belt. “Ready to go. Open the back door, Firebird!”

“As you wish, assassin.” And with that, the back entrance to Ember’s ship opened, revealing a Temple made of mint-green stones.

As Ember stepped closer to the gaping entrance of the Temple, it’s full majesty rose before her.

With its slightly crumbling, sturdy pale green blocks, it seemed to be under the deep seas of another planet, for any shadows that were cast upon it looked like rippling waves. The spaces between the blocks were but veins on a jade-tinted leaf.

“Firebird.” Ember whispered into her wrist watch, and when no one answered, she growled again, “*Firebird!*”

“Yes, Assassin.” Firebird replied, Ember could swear that her voice was rather meek, if ships could have emotions, that is. “What do you need?”

“Can you scan the Temple? I need you to find the sword so we can get out of here as soon as possible.”

“My scanners cannot reach the inner parts of the Temple. The stone that it was created from is jumbling all the signals that I try to send in.”

“So, your answer is no.” Ember asked skeptically.

“That is correct.” Firebird confirmed. “You will need to go in by yourself, I also won’t be able to communicate beyond static, though if my calculations are correct, you should be able to send messages out.”

“I can send you the layout of the Temple.” Ember returned, with a slight smile.

“Great idea. I’ll send you a message when you come back out.”

“Nice work, see you soon.” The thief shut off her watch and stalked towards the shadow-laden Temple’s opening. She let the darkness swallow her whole.

As Ember stepped into the first room, she was greeted by the stench of rotting bodies and mold. Green tinted water dripped from the ceiling, no doubt filled with dust from the crumbling walls. “Nothing in here,” she whispered, doing a quick scan for Firebird. “I’d better investigate the next room.”

The next chamber was much the same, the only difference was the few *vaas* (what us humans know as “space rats”) that were sitting in the corner, gnawing on yellowing bones.

“It’s been almost an hour, and I haven’t found even the *slightest trace* that the sword was even here at one point.” Ember grumbled to herself, she had already chopped the heads off a few *vaas*, she was so frustrated. “I’m leaving.” She wiped the blood that dripped from her sword, on the leg of her pants, leaving a dark emerald streak. It seemed that even *insides* of creatures were green here.

And even though she knew Firebird couldn’t send back a message in return, she whispered into her watch, “I’m on my way out, see you in a minute.” Ember set her rout to the doors.

It only took her a few seconds to realize, the opening was gone.

“What in the...” Ember swore softly as a group of tall figures stepped out of the gloom that descended from the opposing hall. She slipped both swords from where they had been strapped across her back, raising them until the black points almost brushed her nose.

There was a soft chuckle, from what seemed to be coming from a male mouth. “Not so tough now, are you assassin?”

Before Ember’s mother had died, she had taught her many things about fighting. *Don’t even let your enemy smell your fear*, she had often growled at Ember, *they will use it to their advantage. Stand tall even though you know you’re going to lose the fight. Try to scare them off before it even starts.*

“Leave, and perhaps, I’ll spare you and your men.”

“You can’t kill us, and you know it yourself. Poor Rithien, trapped in a corner with no way out.” He laughed again. “Did you at least find the “sword” that I was looking for?”

That's when Ember realized who she was talking to. It was the guy from "Colossal Industries". No wonder she had never heard of the place.

"You." She growled. "What do you want."

"All I need is your head as proof that I killed you." He paused, the same way he had when she had first gotten his call. "Then I can collect all the blood money. Just imagine! It must be enough to buy a whole sector of the galaxy!" He stalked closer, and now she realized that he was holding a pair of twin blades, crafted from an ancient ivory stone.

"I wonder how much gold I can get for *your* head." Ember murmured as she started circling him. The sounds of water dripping on stone echoed off the walls, accompanied by a faint sound that Ember couldn't place.

"You think you can kill me?" He chuckled. "I think it's already too late for that."

That's when Ember realized, that the sounds of dripping pipes was not the only sound coming from behind her. That faint thumping... those were footsteps.

She whirled, her silver hair whipped behind her head. There were at least ten aliens standing behind her, all of them armed.

*I'm not going to live through this.* Ember thought to herself, closing her golden eyes. *This is where the undefeatable, uncatchable, indestructible Ember Rithien ends.*

"Good girl." One of them growled. "This is where your journey ends." There was the bright sound of blades being pulled from their sheaths. A sound Ember had heard thousands of times, though it was normally her own blades.

Ember could feel the cold metal pressing the back of her neck, cutting off her long, silver braid. *This is it. I'll never see Firebird ag-*

Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud sound followed by blinding white light.

"Ember!" She could distantly hear screaming, but her attention was focused on the bright flame stained ship that had blasted through the barrier that had been blocking her exit.

"Firebird?" Ember whispered. Crystal lined her eyes as she realized that she was still alive, that *Firebird* had saved her.

"Ember, get in! Those guys won't be down for long!" *Firebird's* ancient doors opened and Ember charged towards them, not caring that she had left both of her hunting knives lying on the debris-coated ground behind her. And when her boots touched dirty metal floor of her ship, Ember fell to the floor with great, shuddering sobs.

*Alive.* She told herself as they blasted back into space. *Ember Rithien is still alive.*

**The End**