Andrelious didn’t believe a word of it. The story of the vault of Erised was that it contained one’s greatest desire.

“I just don’t see how such a thing could possibly exist. What if one’s desires are intangible? You can’t possibly put a *concept* in a vault,” the Sith stated.

Kooki smiled at her husband.

“It’s just a legend. This is probably just someone trying to profit from it,” she replied.

“Somebody trying to con the gullible? That’s possible. Still, I should perhaps check it out. Most legends have their roots in truth. Even if you have to dig a long way down,” Andrelious commented.

“I’ve never heard of the Piwishc system before,” Kooki declared. “Is it far away?”

The Aedile shook his head. “Only an hour or two’s hyperspace jump. With luck, I’ll be home in time for tea,”

“Come with daddy?” Poppy questioned.

“Not this time. It’s a new place. Could be dangerous,” Andrelious responded, giving his twins a hug.

Baby Mostynn craned his neck round and managed a half smile at his father.

“You girls need to look after Mostynn. And Mummy,” the former Imperial added.

**-x-**

After an uneventful hyperspace journey, Andrelious arrived at the Piwishc system. It consisted of five fairly small planets orbiting a bright green sun. The first two planets were far too close to their star and were little more than barren deserts. The Sith could sense life on the remaining three planets, so he turned his ship towards the third planet. As he approached, he could see that the planet was almost completely covered in green, other than for the polar ice caps and a few clear areas that he guessed were settlements.

*Great. It’s covered in trees.* Andrelious thought.

He was just entering the planet’s atmosphere when his ship’s comm crackled with an incoming message.

“Stay on course, Andrelious,” the voice ordered

The Sith wasn’t expecting anybody on such a remote system to know his name, or indeed that he was even coming and in what kind of ship. Nonetheless, he did as the voice asked.

**-x-**

Andrelious’ flight path took him to the edge of a large clearing. Once he stepped out of his ship, he surveyed the area and spotted a large building constructed from some kind of stone.

A robed figure exited the building. It quickly approached the Sith.

“Come with me, Andrelious. You’ve found what you’ve been looking for,” the figure stated. Andrelious shrugged and followed the figure into the building. The inside was dark, but the Taldryanite could hear the beeping of a computer nearby.

“What is this-“ the male began, but the impact of a blunt object on the back of his head cut him off.

**Imperial Palace**

**Coruscant**

The sun was beginning to rise once again over the Imperial Palace. Although she often liked to sleep in late, Galactic Empress Kookimarissia Mimosa had not had such a luxury since the birth of her son, Mostynn. Although she held almost unlimited power within the galaxy, the job of being a mother made her a little more humble.

The Empress was half asleep when her consort, Andrelious, placed a silver tray with her favourite breakfast in front of her.

“You’re really becoming good at doing what I tell you, babe,” Mimosa observed with a smile.

“Anything to make your life easier, my lord,” Andrelious teased.

Andrelious could not remember a time when he had not been completely in love with Kookimarissia. When they met, the Alderaanian female was an aspiring Sith Lord, and, as the two became a couple, got married and had twin girls, Poppy and Etty, Kookimarissia took over the mantle of Dark Lord of the Sith. Taking the name Darth Moeder, the increasingly powerful woman cemented her power by making Andrelious her chief apprentice, granting him the power of a Sith and the name Darth Colossus.

With her power secure, Darth Moeder took control over vast swathes of the galaxy, crushing the New Republic with her numerous armed forces. A remnant group of the former Empire, calling itself the First Order, also fell by the wayside.

On the face of it, Kookimarissia and Andrelious Mimosa had everything they wanted.

**-x-**

After another typical, slow morning, Andrelious decided to go for a walk around the palace grounds. It was his only chance to enjoy a little peace in between raising his children, and his ‘duties’ as the consort of the galaxy’s ruler.

As he entered the garden, Andrelious spotted a large Human male dressed in black robes. On seeing Andrelious, the man approached him.

“Lord Colossus?” the man asked.

“Correct. Who are you? How did you get past security?” Andrelious responded, his hand moving to the hilt of his lightsaber.

The man raised his arms. “I am of no threat to you, My Lord. But things are not as they seem. None of this is real.”

“And what’s wrong with you? Are you one of those ridiculous Republic Restorationists?” the Sith questioned.

“No. Everything around you is a lie. Even your title. It’s all from the vault of Erised. It’s reading your mind. But you’re strong in the Force, so the vault’s becoming overloaded. The other occupants. Their realities are merging with yours,” the man explained.

Andrelious rolled his eyes. “It’s a new one, I’ll give you that. But I’m afraid it’s also complete nonsense. I am Lord Colossus. I am married to the Lord and Master of the galaxy, Lord Moeder. That’s real. Those emotions can’t be fake. The children can’t be fake,”

“They’re not. They’re alternative versions of your real wife and children. The vault’s extrapolating everything into your deepest desire. This is what you *want*. But it’s not real, Andrelious. I myself have spent the last week trapped in my own desires. The vault. It gives us what we want. But it slowly drains our life away,”

“Why, if that’s true, would you be telling me this?” Andrelious demanded.

“I was one of the builders. I wrote a lot of the code. But the others. They betrayed me. Locked me inside as a ‘test subject’. I’ve been in here for nearly a year. I forgot who I was, but now you’re here, the vault’s gone into overdrive. It’s expending almost its entire processing power on you because you’re so strong with the Force. It’s an oversight that we never thought would happen because the Jedi are long gone. And so are the Sith. Or so we believed,” the man continued.

“If you really helped ‘code’ this place, prove it,” the Sith snapped.

“Easy. Get a pack of sabacc cards. Meet me back here. And don’t tell anyone what’s going on. Not even Lord Moeder. She’s part of the vault. The code’s supposed to detect if anyone’s questioning reality,”

**-x-**

Andrelious wasn’t at all convinced about the man’s rantings, but he still did as he was asked. He was waylaid by having to help put Mostynn down for a nap, but, as luck would have it, Kookimarissia dropped off, too. With the pack of sabacc cards in hand, he headed back for the garden to find the man had set a small table up.

“Right. Shuffle the cards. Then deal three out, face up,” the man instructed.

Andrelious did so. The first three cards were the Ace of Flasks, the 7 of Coins and The Evil One.

“Now pick them up. Shuffle and deal three out again,”

The sceptical Sith shuffled the cards thoroughly. To his shock, the cards were the same three that he dealt before. He was not an expert at sabacc, but he suspected the odds of such a thing happening were incredibly remote.

“Part of my code. I never fully trusted the other builders, so I added in a few fixed events. The first three cards dealt from any sabacc deck within the vault will always be those three,” the man explained.

Andrelious tried three more times, and, sure enough, the same three cards were dealt first.

“So you’re right,” the Sith sighed.

“I’m glad I was able to convince you. With your Force sensitivity, we have a chance of destroying the vault for good. Come with me,” the man ordered, pushing at part of a garden wall. To Andrelious’ amazement, the seemingly solid structure gave way.

“You’d better be right. My Master’s orders are clear. I’m not to leave the palace unless I’m with her. Or I’ve get her permission,” Andrelious commented.

“Wow. You have some *bizarre* desires. I thought you were just in love with her. Seems you actually want her to own you,” the man replied, leading the way through the newly discovered doorway.

**-x-**

On the other side of the doorway was a large, dimly lit room that was devoid of any obvious features. Andrelious thought it resembled the cargo hold of a large freighter.

“Welcome to the neutral zone. I coded this into the vault to allow escape should I be trapped, but I didn’t reckon for the other builders ability to wire me in. With you inside, security elsewhere has gone absolutely haywire, but the system’s going to realise you’re gone very soon. We must act quickly,” the man explained.

“But there’s no door. Or any obvious exits. I don’t even see how we got in,” Andrelious replied, his eyes hopefully scanning for a way out. As he examined the walls, he spotted several other people seemingly busying themselves with datapads, holobooks, or even games of sabacc.

“Isn’t that pointless? I thought you said the first three cards were always the same,” the Sith queried.

“Not in the neutral zone. They’ve been here for a few hours. They’re helping to overload the system by crossing their realities over. If the vault has to generate too many contradicting desires, it will either shut down. Or explode and kill us all anyway,”

“So this could all be for nothing?” Andrelious hissed.

“Not for nothing. The vault’s one of a kind. If it does explode, the authorities back on Piwishc III will investigate. The technology will be outlawed and its creators arrested,” the man answered coolly.

The Sith frowned. “So what do you want me to do?”

“Simple. Meditate. Connect to your *real* family. Neither the software nor hardware are designed to deal with a Force user. Even if it doesn’t overload the system, you’ll hopefully get through to them and bring them here. And your real wife won’t fall into the trap,”

Andrelious had to admit the idea had some merit. He sat down in a quiet corner of the room, desperately trying to picture his family. At first, all he could see were the last few hours, but, as he concentrated harder and tried to remember specific details, he started to see a new side to them. Kookimarissia was real. She was indeed a Sith, and Andrelious was terrified of her, but she was nowhere near as powerful as the vault had made her out to be. Instead of being Galactic Empress, she lived inside a mountain with Andrelious and their children, who looked exactly the same as always.

“It’s overloading! The walls are crumbling! We’re out of here!” the man’s voice cheered, but Andrelious noticed the voice beginning to fade.

**-x-**

“There you are!” Kooki shouted, running over to Andrelious and kissing him firmly.

Andrelious quickly realised that he was back in the real world.

“You’ve been calling me here for the last week! The girls and I have been worried sick!” the Alderaanian explained, as the two identical girls hugged their father.

“Yes. It seems that the vault was real. But whoever made it, and for whatever purpose, they didn’t work out that I was going to overload their system. Thank the Force for…well, the Force,” the male quipped.

“Let’s just get home. Rian needs us for the next phase of the Caelus takeover,” Kooki stated matter- of-factly.

**-x**-

The journey back to the Caelus system was just as uneventful as Andrelious’ last hyperspace jump. He and Kooki played with the twins, before picking Mostynn up and heading back to their mountain home. Once all three children were asleep, the couple decided to play a few hands of Sabacc before heading to bed themselves.

Andrelious started to deal.

*Ace of Flasks.*

*Seven of Coins*

*The Evil On….hold on!*

Andrelious looked shocked. The first three cards were the same. Again!

Was he still stuck inside the vault?

Or was it just coincidence?

He wondered if he’d ever know.

*FIN*