

Chapter 43
716 FNM (22 BBY)
Month 10

Mandalore, Near Sundari, Outer District
Korkie Kryze

When my adventure comes to an end, I did not expect that I'll be doing anything else afterwards. Since, well, I already turned in the artifacts I found over to archaeologists, and they'll figure out what those artifacts are from there. The museum curators are still documenting what we have as they are still going over the manifest and information aboard the Seeker's Vigil even while we're setting up for the Cultural Festival. I thought that I would at least have time to rest and relax. Unfortunately, the Cultural Festival is almost here and a lot of work needs to be done before the event kicks off.

Officially, the Cultural Festival will begin eight hours from now at 6:00 p.m. Aunt Satine will begin the festival, and it's scheduled to go on for five days. The first week of the year 717 FNM.

There are quite a bit of events and shows locked down from what I understood. From the arrival of the *Kandosii* I found on Breshig near the midpoint of the week, to concerts and several other projects that many high-ranking Mandalorian nobles had accomplished throughout the sector.

I wasn't aware of everything that was going to be underway. I am a prince of Mandalore sure, but there are too many projects that are going to be displayed that it is too much to get to know all of them on such short notice. There are projects that Tanya had spearheaded, some that Auntie Satine had spearheaded that I had not been involved with. That doesn't even include the projects from Gargon, Ordo, Jakelia, Concordia, Vorpa'ya, and many more that I barely had any contact with, which add to the amount of cultural displays and events on offer. So I only knew what I needed to know, as there is too much stuff to learn about every event before the festival started. It is a testament to Professor Wren's ability that he organized the festival to have everything ready at the same time.

My focus is on the projects I spearheaded. First, the *Kandosii*, which was currently scheduled to arrive in system mid-festival three days from now, so that is Tom's responsibility until then. Second, overseeing the Seeker's Vigil, the relic ship we had recovered from the asteroid in the Msst system, which made it here safely to Mandalore. Here being an outer district, just outside the dome created over the last three months. A block-like structure with plasteel-reinforced glass designed to house the ship as well as expand the storage capacity of the city in a new warehouse zone. The structure would likely be absorbed into the dome as it naturally expanded in the next few years or so with the influx of migrants to the planet.

Said block-like structure is large enough that the architect had bragged that a fourth of the population of the Sundari could visit it all at once. It probably would never reach that point, though, as there would be celebrations going on throughout Sundari to compete with our

attention. At its peak, the busiest time would probably be at its grand opening, before slowly petering out.

The concert for the Gargon Girls would be towards the heart of Sundari, which would keep people away from outer districts for a while, and there are other institutions opening their doors for various artifacts in various parts of Sundari. The localnet message boards are flooded with people organizing the most efficient routes to various events, as well as locals highlighting various shops and rest-stops to visit in between events. Businesses, seeing the festival as a good opportunity to make money, are advertising various deals and discounts to attract customers as well as decorate their businesses to highlight their cultural origin. Overall, it is the liveliest Sundari had ever been.

The Vigil had landed on a platform within the inside of the Cube, which would not be its final resting place. The main artifact research center is in The Old City and Capital of Keldabe on the other side of the planet, and that would be the ship's final destination. For now, it's being parked here, and the artifacts cataloged and put on display throughout a large building inside the block for people to view. And there are quite a lot of relics to look at and learn.

From armor styles and ancient weapons to other artifacts that seem to be of other cultures. There are a lot of artifacts that match those from Twi'lek culture, that supposedly represent many generations. Why are they on a Mandalorian ship? If they had been made of valuable material, I would have suspected that the reason it's there is possibly due to it being plunder or loot. But since they aren't made of valuables, other than a few being made of beskar, and that this was a ship that was supposed to be a vault of Mandalorian culture. These items were mixed with several Mandalorian helmets modified for head tails, which would indicate that this ship had, near the end of its life, been mainly run by Mandalorian Twi'leks. Personally, I thought perhaps we should see if we could find who those artifacts belong to and maybe transfer them back to Ryloth.

But chances of finding the original owners' clan are very slim. The records on the last crew of this archive ship indicated that it had been abandoned sometime after the Fall of Breshig with the original crew catching a ride with Mandalorians evacuating the secretive shipyard to somewhere else in the Mandalore sector.

Considering that Twi'lek's have a very low population within the Mandalore sector these days, it shouldn't be too hard to find them within the Mandalore sector if they were still here. But if they had sided with any of the political factions over the last seven to eight hundred years, they could have easily been wiped out or pushed out.

Shaking my head, I tried to not think about that dark possibility and hoped that perhaps these Twi'leks could be found. For now though, I would focus on what is before me and it is a rather boring task. As the one who led the expedition of finding this ship, it was necessary for me to be here in order to show off and explain how I came across this ancient relic.

I am also here to make sure that the archaeologists did their jobs in setting up the Seeker's Vigil for exhibition. A very tedious management job that I could not wait to go back to college for. My last year of schooling would probably be just as boring, but at least there was some sort of purpose with all of that. Here, I felt somewhat useless just watching others do work while I sat behind a desk. I want to explore more of Mandalore's secrets; that is the most excitement I've had in a long time. I also don't have any friends to talk to because Sonnie is busy slicing into the Vigil's servers with the other Archivists while Amis and Lagos have unfinished homework they needed to complete, so they aren't here at the moment.

So further exploration would have to wait for now.

Sighing, I looked over at the ship, still amazed at how good it's condition is. This thing is nearly three to four thousand years old and had pretty much flown like anything made in the modern day. Of course, the Vigil's shields and apparently outdated guns are pitiful, but it still exists. It had people who had crewed her - meanwhile, not that long ago, we were fighting for her right to exist and be remembered. It's amazing that the original crew took care of her this whole time. You would think pirates would have gotten their hands on her sooner or later.

It's probably for the best that the ship didn't know that she would be the cornerstone in my family's attempt to study Mandalorian history. We didn't need to be warlords to have a fondness for history, right?

I lean back, looking up at the ceiling for a moment. Wondering if I've done the right thing uncovering all of this stuff, before I heard a feminine voice to the side of me. "Impressively well kept, I would have expected something this old to have rusted away by now. You can tell the crew of this ship had some real love for it." Bringing my head down to the side to look at the person who had spoken, I had to do a careful examination.

Standing just a meter away from me is a woman in her early twenties, I think she is around my age. She has dark black hair that seemed to just absorb the surrounding light, going down to her shoulders and, somehow, giving Soniee a run for her money when it came to the assets in the chest area. In fact, the girl gave pretty much everyone I'd ever seen a little bit of a run for their money. And I simply had to force myself to maintain some control over my mind.

Sitting up straighter, I said, "Yes, ma'am, whoever was responsible for this ship's maintenance did a great job over the last three thousand years or so. The only reason it didn't have any maintenance over the last thousand is that it was abandoned. Thankfully, she was abandoned in a place no one knew where to look until today. Now all the relics and ancient information about Mandalore are being carefully cataloged and analyzed. Once that's done, a copy of everything onboard will be sent to every major Mandalorian planet in the system so that we can all learn about our history."

"Oh, that's a nice gesture." The woman said in a tone that heavily implied the opposite, turning, and I got a better look at her. She had a rather well-made-up face; she looked like she belonged

as a member of the Gargon Girls or perhaps on some sort of magazine cover, instead of her strange uniform. The uniform was not something the New or Old Mandalorians wore. The uniform in question had a lot of red bars and looked quite military-esque, but I did not recognize the design or patterns.

"What about Mandalorian systems outside the Mandalorian sector? Will they be receiving a copy of this information?"

I raised an eyebrow before saying, "I'm not sure, I've never given that much thought but it shouldn't be that hard to do. The Mandalorian systems outside the Mandalorian sector aren't exactly something we worry about."

"Hmm, yes, that does tend to be true. Mandalorians of the sector seem only to care about the major clans and not those who are outside the sector or the clanless. After all, how else would they have gotten away with the slave labor imposed on the clanless during the Civil War?"

That is an odd segue to our conversation, but I let it go to answer, "I guess twenty years ago that would make sense, however, New Mandalorians are different. We don't care if a person is clanless or not, we just focus on trying to rebuild the sector from the damage caused by the Civil War. So that everyone has a good standard of living."

"And by focusing on rebuilding the sector, you have abandoned the Mandalorians outside the sector - truly a noble sacrifice of those who were harshly treated by the last rulers."

Okay, this conversation seemed to be taking a weird turn. Looking at the woman, I said, "I guess we can't really help those outside the sector if we can't help those inside the sector now, can we? After all, without the New Mandalorians instituting pacifism within the sector, the old barbarism would simply take the sector over."

"The old barbarism that has to do with the clans that the New Mandalorians are currently in the process of kowtowing to, in my opinion. Their acceptance of that new Silver ideology seems to indicate that they were never really pacifist; they were just going along with the first ideology that seemed to promise them the end of the war."

"That's not true." I said, getting up from my seat, so I could stand at my full height, noting that I was slightly taller than the girl was standing, "Pacifism is still a core tenant of the New Mandalorians. Yes, if you have been taking on some aspects of the Silver Codex, that's only for economic reasons."

"Was it only for economic reasons that the Silver Mandalorian invaded Geonosis to rescue the Princess of Mandalore or was it perhaps something else? I wonder." She asked with a raised eyebrow.

I stopped because I do still have a definite concern ever since I heard about that incident. The possibility that White Silver is trying to influence my sister in some way is a bit concerning. While she may be politically savvy, she is already a supporter of White Silver in her own way. If she were to come out as an outright supporter, though, that would be troubling.

The Ithorians' agreement for terraforming Mandalore, the geoengineering project, had started recently on our homeworld as they had made early progress near the southern poles. The visible and positive progress of the terraforming project, mixed with Tanya's connections to White Silver, could spur another mass migration of people to join the Silver movement. In an awkward way, it felt like the terraforming project was another major step towards the end of New Mandalorian pacifism.

Shaking my head, I said, "That may be a point—"

"Of course, it's a point. The New Mandalorians did not go far enough in removing the clans that started the fighting, and now their corrupted forces are slowly chipping away at pacifism from you."

I blinked, not really familiar with that point of view, "Where are you from? You said you're from outside the sector, right? What planet?"

"Oh, of course, where are my manners? I'm Natalya of Anteevy, the slave colony the last governor of Mandalore was using to supply his war effort."

I did a double-take and refocused on what she had just said, "Wait, isn't that the planet that tried to kill my sister?" Before I could really get into my thoughts on that, she interrupted me.

"A rogue agent from our planet, very radical, wanted to fight her own revolution without oversight or the support of the workers and escaped with two battalions of battle droids. She has been arrested, tried, and thrown into jail that she'll probably never see the light of day again. We do not support her actions or wish to eliminate the monarchy like she did. Our intentions are reformist, not revolutionary."

I blinked, not really sure if she's telling me the truth or not as I have no way to verify it, but if it is true, I have no option but to accept it and say, "Alright, still, that's not exactly the best foot forward diplomatically. The first thing I hear about your people is that they attempted to kill my sister, and now you're just here. Why are you here, exactly?"

"We're here because we're Mandalorian as much as anyone else in this festival. Why we're here is to repair our image, as that crazed anti-monarchist has soured it and cut some of our trade with allies within the sector. Our glorious leader, Comrade Secretary-General Lilia, understood that if we came to the cultural festival and made our claims clear that we are not anti-Mandalorian, just anti-clan, we could restore our reputation as friends to the Mandalore sector."

I blinked, somewhat confused, but shrugged, saying, "I guess if you're only here to take part in the festival, there's nothing wrong with that, though I'm not really sure how you can say you're Mandalorian while also being anti-clan."

"Don't you know about clanless Mandalorians? We simply understand that the clans are the ones responsible for many of the wars that Mandalore has faced. Power structures want to be in control of other clans, in an endless battle of power and politics, creating a system of vassalization and corruption. Forcing us ever onwards to more and more conquest, until eventually we are stamped down by our neighbors because our leaders will run amok and never figure out the best way to actually win the war they start. War is a terrible thing, but if it must be done, it must be done logically and not based on simple honor or clan respect. It must be terrible and swift. And until the clan heads that control Mandalorian space acknowledge that they are a problem, that they have *created* many problems, we must have someone here to stand for the people who do not live within major clans, for the clanless and the lesser clans who are held down by these upper clans."

"I'm sorry, I don't really understand what you're saying here. Is war bad, or is it something we should be doing?" I said to the first part, not having a problem with the second part, per se, I guess.

I mean, if they believe that the clan structures are responsible for war, yeah, I guess they should be trying to stamp down on that, but the entire perspective she was offering clearly demanded some form of conflict, it was a bit confusing trying to understand what exactly her position on a war would be.

"War is terrible, but it is prolonged by the clans wanting to fight out their ancient grievances until none of us are left to fight for them. If war should happen, it should be done by the droids, the iron children of Mandalore. They can survive war much better and can follow orders without committing crimes to prolong the war. That way, Mandalorians hands stayed clean and can stay pacifist."

"...Okay. But didn't the last Mand'alor get the Republic to ban the use of Battle Droids by anyone in the sector?"

"The Mand'alor? Hah, that was just a governor, he never seized the title of Mand'alor. Of course, the entire sector suffers from the actions of one radical on Mandalore. Besides that, droids are not built solely for battle."

That didn't actually sound too bad, really. I mean, that had been a problem for many generations, from what I had read: Clans fighting each other to the bitter end. But if battles could be determined by droids fighting droids, it would lessen the actual damage done to the people, especially if you put in proper programming to prevent the droids from targeting civilian populations.

It wasn't a bad answer and it is much better than Silver's when I thought about it. Let droids fight droids, not Mandalorians versus Mandalorians. I mean, I wasn't a fan of fighting at all, but if there had to be fighting better it be machines than sentient lives.

Natalya noticed my thoughtful look before saying, "You see it too, don't you? How the current pacifism is enamored with these economic ideas from the Silver Mandalorian, and yet it is simply falling back into the old ways in their own way, still pushing for military spending. After all, they just raised several regiments across the sector. For what reason would they need these regiments, I wonder?"

"Well, they are for the protection of the sector. There have been some rather concerning attacks in the sector over the last few years, as well as the galaxy itself being at war." I pointed out.

"Hmm, perhaps. Although, I wouldn't doubt that all these attacks seem to have some connection to the Silver Mandalorian. I wonder if they're perhaps engineered to get the result they want. Establish a power base by having a patsy create a false Mand'alor to take a planet, drive up fear of attacks by having attacks happen and connecting them to older groups that shouldn't be around, such as what I've heard happened on Gargon a few months back. Death Watch coming out of history to attack a couple of dancers on Gargon seems rather far fetched, and didn't Death Watch try to kill you when you grabbed this ship?"

I blinked before nodding my confirmation to that; there was no denying that the group we'd run into had Death Watch symbolism all over their vehicles before they were captured.

"What better way to drive people towards the Silver ideology than to make false attacks upon Silver and New Mandalorian ideology? Just imagine what would have happened if you also announced your support for the White Silver after nearly being killed by Death Watch."

I took a step back before sitting down. That was something I hadn't considered, but it would have been devastating for the New Mandalorian ideology.

"I wonder how long it'll be before your aunt decides that she must adopt the Silver ideology, and in what way will she do it."

"She'd never do that," I said, standing back up strongly. "Duchess Satine is strong in her belief in pacifism; she would never abandon it for some martial ideology."

"Hmm, I can only hope you're right. But from my perspective, it seems like the New Mandalorian ideology is already nearly dead and just needs a few more blows before it is abandoned for the Silver way of doing things. The question is: will this Silver ideology be truthful in its commitment to not starting wars, or is it a lie in preparation for a new crusade against the galaxy? It would be a great time to start it with the Republic and the CIS at each other's throats. Plenty of space actually, both of them not caring about it, could be seized by an enterprising warlord."

"Duchess Satine would never do that."

"Yes, you're right. The Duchess of Mandalore would never do that, but would the Mand'alor of the Mandalore sector say the same? She's never taken that title. Letting someone else take that title and letting them use the forces she created is not outside the realm of possibility."

"I think you are exaggerating and I think that we're done having this conversation." I said, turning away from her and taking my seat again. "If you have any questions about this ship, I'd gladly talk about the ship. If you have questions about history, I'd gladly talk about that. But if you're going to question my honest commitment to pacifism, I'm not going to listen to you."

"Very well then, if that's how you want to take that situation, that's fine by me. I will just leave you with a few words of thought. If you ever believe that your aunt's commitment to pacifism and the peace you want to protect is not as solid as you wish it was, Anteevy is more than willing to help you out.

We wish for pacifism and peace to prosper within the Mandalorian sector just as much as you do. Mandalore can only prosper if a peaceful faction is in control, one that will not kowtow to the Silver Mandalorian and the clans that they represent. Just seek us out if you ever need our hands, and our hands will be there to help you, my young comrade, Prince."

With that, Natalya turned and started walking away, and I was both glad and confused as she did so. Glad because I didn't have to listen to any more of her comments on my aunt, and confused because her skirt was so short.

After I was sure she was gone, I had to take a moment to get my head on straight. I needed to talk to someone I actually considered a friend. I know she said not to interrupt her work, but Soniee would know what to do about this. I punched Soniee's contact on my vambrace and waited.

Mandalore, Sundari Royal Palace
General Secretary Liliya Vhekayno Shepest

The chamber was light and airy, with several oxygenating plants dotting the walls in carved stone pots. The expansive room was dominated by a truly gorgeous desk made from pale gray wood, with dazzling patterns in the grain. It is likely that the table itself costs more than my entire department, or literally priceless if it is from an extinct species.

A window overlooking the bustling city center dominated the eastern wall, while on the west were a variety of cabinets and shelves with a wide array of cultural artifacts and an impressionist-style mural.

I had to admit that Satine's office was utterly delightful, tasteful, and well furnished. It is bigger and richer than my own, but that is to be expected when comparing the ruler of an ice ball to the ruler of an entire sector. I smoothed my dress and schooled my features as the double door entrance slid open with little more than a whisper.

I turned away from the mural and towards the duo. The pair were openly scowling, likely from some petty idea of moral superiority. I responded to the open hostility with a friendly smile that seemed to deepen the Mandalorian bourgeoisie's expression of disdain.

"Ah, Duchess, Prime Minister. It is a pleasure to meet you both in person at last."

"You are lucky you even made groundfall; you have the graciousness of the Duchess to thank for that, youngling killer." Impressively hostile for a New Mandalorian. From the look of it the man wanted nothing more than to strike me. I prevented the smile on my face from growing too smug, as it was always delightful to be in the presence of impotent killers.

"Of course, the good Duchess has my gratitude. From this kindness, let us walk into the fields of mutual respect and understanding." I gave a nod to Satine, who was seating herself behind the desk.

"My disgust-"

"Thank you, Prime Minister. That will be all." Almec seemed taken aback by his dismissal from Satine but collected himself in short order, offering a bow to the Duchess and one last scornful look at me before departing.

There was a moment of quiet as I was left alone with the Duchess, not even a guard in the room to keep an eye on me. I wondered for a moment just what security the office had. Cameras, hidden microphones, concealed auto turrets, shield generators, and other such things that I had delighted in using for my own security that are also spread across the expansive subterranean cities of Anteevy. Of course, there could indeed be nothing visible, not that I had any intention of finding out in the short term. Killing Satine now would be, quite frankly, a stupid decision.

"I was unsure if I should allow you and your people to land. It is my hope that by offering your people a place here, a war may be averted before it begins." Her face was set, resolved.

"It is the duty of leaders to make hard decisions, to make choices that we are sometimes uncomfortable with." I began, taking a rather comfortable seat across from the Duchess.

"There are things we must address." Satine said pointedly.

"Of course."

"My... niece, she was adamant that I should refuse you, that no accord could be made between us." Ah, Tanya, I felt my heart thump at how the playful Fey is playing hard to get, as she ever did.

"I can hardly blame her. Because of the foolish actions of someone who has been appropriately punished, she was attacked. I can't imagine how frightening that must have been. I can only praise the Royal Guard for their professionalism in protecting the young princess." Despite my masterful demonstration of sounding utterly sincere, Satine seemed unmoved.

"Appropriately punished? Care to elaborate?"

"Of course, on Anteevy, our justice system is not controlled by the Workers' Council but by the people. While I was the one who brought charges against the officer in question, who led the unsanctioned attack against dear Princess Tanya, it was the people of Anteevy who decided if the accused are guilty of crimes and what the punishment should be. The people of Anteevy were utterly disgusted that the criminal in question would engage in such unprovoked violence. Said officer is working off her crime in a correctional facility."

"And if the people of Anteevy had decided that they supported her attempt to murder my niece?" I quickly presented the appearance of a woman beset by shock, with just a hint of mortification.

"I could not imagine that the people of Anteevy would ever support such a thing. We have sought to abandon the long history of violence and war that has plagued our people for so long."

"So you say." Satine kept her steely gaze focused on my person. While my taste in women is normally more discerning, Satine, like Tanya, is striking enough to draw my attention. The both of them remain enticing, despite Satine being rather over-ripe. I felt a slight flutter of excitement flow through me, but carefully schooled my expression.

"I know it's difficult to trust me," I said softly, as I looked into her eyes. "I came to power at such a young age. Goodness, I was passionate then; I thought I could change everything in an instant, that I could force the issue, cast off the old trappings of the Mandalore system. It is hard to admit I went a bit far in a few places." Satine's armor cracked a little as her gaze softened.

"A bit far is underselling things, General Secretary."

"I won't pretend that the revolution was clean or bloodless... but that is the foundation from which I must build a better future for my people-an example for all people. I am not asking for forgiveness, I am asking for a chance to build a better future together." I reached across the table to place a hand upon her own, the sudden move caused her to flinch and almost pull away.

"Duchess Satine, please, I don't want our people to fight. I don't want to see a single drop of blood shed if I can help it. For everything you have done for your people, to turn away from war, help me do the same for mine."

"I was advised, by practically everyone, not to trust you, General Secretary." Satine said slowly, cautiously.

"I will do everything, anything to prove them wrong, Duchess Satine. Our people don't need to hate each other; we don't need to hate each other." With that, she was quiet again. I was afraid for a moment that I had overplayed my hand, but after holding my gaze for far too many heartbeats, she looked away, and I let out a breath I had been holding.

"I shall hold you to that promise, General Secretary." It was hard not to allow the grin to overwhelm my face as I shifted back into my seat.

"Thank you. And please, call me Liliya. Trust me, it won't hurt." I gave her a wink, and she finally gave a small smile and shook her head.

"If I must... Liliya. We have to go through your contributions to the festival." I reached into my dress and produced a small datapad.

"It would be my pleasure, Satine."

Mandalore, Sundari Outskirts

Bo-Katan Kryze

"Wow, this place is looking rather upbeat. I always felt like Sundari was more dead than alive." I said absentmindedly as I looked around. I wasn't exactly a fan of the city that Satine had helped create. Oh sure, the structures were nice and I guess it's fine, but I just wasn't a fan of how everyone seemed to wear the exact same thing and all colors seemed to have been drained from the people.

But I hadn't been to Sundari in a couple of years, and it seemed that a few things had changed. For one, people openly wearing pieces of armor have continued and color is back on the menu in many places too. Buildings are more colorful as well; there seemed to be a renaissance of color, in fact.

Everywhere I looked the people just seemed generally happier now than when I was last here. I'm on the outskirts of Sundari, which had been apparently rented by the government for one of the many venues set up for this cultural festival. It was a crazy idea, but one that seemed to be working out.

People seemed to be just moving around and enjoying the various booze and booths. Lots of people were drinking, and many were having fun playing carnival games at best, or a few more advanced things. I did notice that there seemed to be a tendency for more people to be near ones that added a bit more violence to them.

Currently, there appeared to be two people in what was best described as a water arena. How they had the money to afford that much water, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if they cut a few corners and were reusing recycled water. But either way, it looked clean enough, and the pair of individuals fighting each other with foam-tipped poles are having a blast trying to smack their opponent into the water.

As all good things come to an end, one individual finally got the upper hand and smashed the other person's head so hard they fell into the water. I was a bit concerned for a moment, wondering if they had taken into account the possibility that someone would drown, but the person came up gasping for air and walked to the side of the thigh high pit as another person jumped onto the pillar they vacated, appearing to want to challenge the victor.

"Not a bad hit." Governor Pre Vizsla said as he stood next to me. Officially, we are in a work meeting; unofficially, we are just enjoying the festivities.

I am wearing my red-colored armor, as is standard. Pre is wearing just his governor suit, still trying to keep the fact that he was the secret Mand'alor a secret, I assume. Although, I guess he isn't the secret Mand'alor anymore, just the commanding officer of the Death Watch now.

"You know, things like this kind of make me think that things are getting better on Mandalore," he said with a wistful nod of his head.

"What do you mean?" I asked, knowing that this was him reaching out, and I thought I'd better reach back.

"The New Mandalorians are not outright attacking the old Mandalorian ways anymore. They're not embracing them, but they're tolerant now, and they're more accepting of violence. Granted, it's play-violence, but it's a step in the right direction."

I nodded at that before saying, "A step in the right direction doesn't mean you're not interested in becoming Mand'alor anymore."

He laughed at that before saying, "Oh, I'm always interested in becoming Mand'alor, but I'm willing to consider other paths to my seat at the table. Perhaps I can woo your sister; she's not married, after all."

I let out a laugh at that before saying, "You're not her type."

"Oh, she has something against me that I don't know about?"

"More like I have a feeling that she's holding out hope for someone."

"Really? I didn't know that. What makes you think that?"

I shrugged before saying, "Just the way she talks about some old times reminds me of a maiden in love, and one that hasn't exactly given up on that love."

"Hmm, that's unfortunate. Still, there are other options. I have plenty of ways I could ascend to the throne peacefully, especially with the game she has presented of who is better at protecting Mandalore. Even with the forces now under her control, thanks to the Self-Defense Force, I don't think they'll be enough to withstand what's coming, especially with how the war may shake out."

Turning to him, I asked, "How bad do you think the war is going to be? I mean, it's between the Republic and the CIS, right? We're supposed to stay neutral in the coming conflict, at least as far as Satine's concerned."

Pre looked down over the water pit for a moment before saying, "They may think it's not going to be so bad, but I think it's probably going to be a lot worse. We are on a major trade route, and there are going to be factions that don't like Satine's point of view. I was living under the delusion that she was going to come down hard on anyone that wanted to leave the sector to possibly participate, be it for money or personal reasons."

And yet, I hear she's let a captain of her own Royal Guard volunteer himself and joined the Republic as a Fighter Pilot trainer, which means she's not going to prevent anyone from personally joining the war. People will choose sides, people will go out there and have an adventure, and people will make decisions that don't support her.

Then there's one particular rumor I've heard about a new True Mandalorian recruiting a force on Concord Dawn, saying they're going to fight for the Confederacy. Somehow win the freedom of the Mandalorian sector from the Republic without the CIS actually invading the sector."

I grunted at that. "Doubtful. If they don't enter the sector, they can't exactly free the sector from the Republic."

"Exactly the problem. Someone's going to raise an army, someone is going to think of a way to invade and start a war. What happens after that is where the opportunities for the Death Watch lie, even if we might have to change the name."

"You're thinking about changing the name?" I asked, a bit confused by what he said.

Pre shrugged before saying, "Not too greatly. 'Watch Guardians' or something like that. I'm still working on it. We'll probably come up with something better eventually, especially with a

splinter-faction out there pretending to be Death Watch and causing problems for us. So, it might be worth changing the name, to differentiate ourselves from this other organization and unmask them."

"Pretenders. Such a pain in our ass." I said with a sigh. "A little slip-up, and we'll deal with them. It's only a matter of time."

He nodded before turning away from the arena and saying, "By the way, Bo, when the conflict starts, you're willing to change the color of your armor, right? We've got to look like we're a single front, not a bunch of disparate factions fighting for different goals. We have to be united in principle as well as practice."

I waved him off before saying, "Yes, yes, blue and silver and black, I know. I'm actually planning to stop by an armor painter back on Gargon before I turn in my paperwork, so I can go gallivanting around the galaxy with you on whatever this quest for the Mand'alor will be."

He nodded before sighing and saying, "Good, good. By the way, that other project, how's that coming along?"

"You mean the Death Watch idol program?" I said with a laugh. "It's fine. Finding a couple of girls who can sing isn't that hard. Finding ones with stage presence is a little harder. Finding a personality to make their own to be separate from the Gargon Girls is another trial altogether. I think I found a duet that should do the job, although they're a bit... dark in their lyrics."

"What do you mean?" Pre asked.

I shrugged before saying, "The Gargon Girls are more smooth storytellers. The Death Watch girls are storytellers too, but they're more about driving the knowledge down into your skull with their singing. Some of the notes turn from notes to just plain out screaming. Which kind of works, as a few pieces of music they've given me have all been about surviving near-death experiences. In fact, I'm kind of worried about those two I picked being a little too focused on the 'death' in Death Watch. But I will admit, with the right songs, they will get your blood pumping."

"Hmm, that's concerning, but not something that's a deal-breaker. If you can get those two up to the standards necessary to compete with the Gargon Girls, that'll be fine by me. Keep at it."

I shrugged and said, "Will do." before my vambrace beeped, causing me to look at it.

"And that's my cue." I said, standing up and wiping a little bit of water that had splashed onto my armor. "I need to get over to the Royal Palace. Satine's having a big start-of-the-cultural-festival event there."

"Yes, I heard about that," Pre said. "I got invited along with a bunch of other governors, though I wasn't really sure if I should attend. After all, it's just a bunch of pageantry."

"Oh, you have no idea what kind of pageantry is going on today. I would suggest you should come; you're going to have your socks knocked off, as well as most of the damn planet."

Pre narrowed his eyes before saying, "Now I am unsure if I should be intrigued or dreading what is about to happen. But, fine, I'll be there"

Mandalore, Sundari Royal Palace

Tanya Kryze

Now that I am back on Mandalore, I am surprised by how much had changed since the last time I'd been away. This time, I wasn't being called back to be reprimanded by Aunt Satine about my methods; instead, I am back for a cultural festival. I had managed to avoid a scandal, only a short video of me fighting against the thugs while on my recent date with Ordo made it onto the holonet. But it seemed that the encounter wasn't noticed at all. Vai assured me that it had only circulated on small holonet shows that seemed to be highly anti-Mandalore and that the public, the part that knew who I was anyway, had come to expect events like this. That renders a lot of their rhetoric ineffective at altering people's perception of me one way or the other.

On Mandalore, a lot of significant events are coming to their conclusion, and people are gathering here to celebrate. In a few cases, great things are just beginning: the terraforming of the southern hemisphere of Mandalore had already begun. The ice packs that have frozen over down there after the nuclear winter caused by the Excision are being carefully thawed. Hardy flora are being introduced in the hopes of improving the conditions enough that the ice packs would continue to melt on their own.

Efforts are also being made to find water that had retreated under the surface in several areas, with explorations of underground aquifers being conducted. Pumping this water to the surface would help reduce the amount of particulates in the air by introducing more water to the rain cycle and for the rain itself to scrub the atmosphere of pollutants naturally.

Mud might not be as clean as dust to get off, but it was easier to contain and transport than dust. The sand is filled with particulates that aren't exactly healthy for people with long-term exposure. Reducing these pollutants would increase the habitability of Mandalore enough for people to go outside the domes once more.

From my brief conversations with the Ithorians, it seemed that the first phase of turning the earthy beige, dusty dunes of this planet into mud piles should be completed within a year and a half. After that, they just needed to introduce plant life in any areas that didn't have some lucky remnants of seeds from the last plants that had gone into some sort of stasis when the waters on the surface had retreated to the underground reservoirs.

All in all, holding a festival that happened to coincide with the start of this process is a great idea from a propaganda standpoint. It would do wonders for our clan's control of Mandalore, if not the whole sector.

The simple notion that one day the surface of Mandalore might actually be livable again rather than merely survivable would be a cornerstone of all future efforts in maintaining power. It would be nearly impossible to dissuade people from siding with Satine's New Mandalorian faction at that point.

"Nearly" being the operative word here, as there would always be those who would fight against Satine simply for past crimes or because they wanted to be the ruler of Mandalore themselves. But hopefully, with a larger contingent of people supporting her faction, it would be more secure in maintaining control.

That is probably why she is holding this whole celebration startup event today, which I hadn't been informed about until the last few minutes. Then again, I'd only arrived yesterday, coming straight back from Coruscant after the tedium of my work there.

I probably wouldn't be returning to Coruscant for a month. Not just because I was bored and had nothing to do, as the senator from Mandalore was taking care of everything nowadays, but because the current galactic situation had taken a rather familiar tone.

At this moment, the Republic fleet was engaged in the search for something called the Malevolence, a superweapon of sorts. It was a ship designed to knock out other ships through massive use of EMP weapons. Once those ships didn't have the shields or capabilities to defend themselves, they were then obliterated by the said super ship and her escorts.

So far, it was believed that the CIS only had one, but it seemed unlikely to me. A simple fact about government expenditures: it's easier to produce two or more of something than it is to produce one. Economies of scale and all that. Considering we only knew about the Malevolence due to the missing survivors from one of the battles, it seemed likely that there probably were other ships of that class in waiting or under construction.

Trade lanes were a bit more barren these days, so it wouldn't be surprising if the Malevolence was unleashed as a full commerce raider to try and hurt the Republic lines of supply. So far, no one knows exactly where the Malevolence is, so there's still a possibility that it would attack me on my way back to Coruscant. Thus, it might be best to stay on Mandalore for at least a month until that situation is handled.

Though if I had a fleet killer like that, I would have used it to strike at key Republic shipyards instead of having it be essentially a U-Boat, a U-Boat that can sink entire fleets but a U-Boat nonetheless. I mean, what is the Republic Navy going to do when a fleet killer arrives at their orbital shipyards? Feed it enough fleets that the superweapon chokes on it? Either way, it would deal a lot of damage to the Republic Navy when it is backed by a substantial fleet. Getting to the

shipyards might be an issue, but the disruption to the Republic Navy's plans might be worth it either way.

Make no mistake, though, I believed the situation would be handled. The CIS was falling into the same trap that Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany did with their super ships. They were letting it run amok, assuming that they could handle any threat it ran into. The Yamato class's downfall and the Bismarck are prime examples of why assuming a super ship can handle anything is a mistake.

Heck, the only ship I could think of that had gone and done what those ships had tried to do was the Grey Ghost or the USS Enterprise. That was simply because it was probably the luckiest ship ever put to water. And even then, she always had constant destroyer escorts nearby to protect her. She paved the way to the US's modern Carrier Battle Group doctrine which dominates both sea and air.

While I somewhat enjoyed thinking about the military situation in the galaxy, it is really not my domain. Mine is politics, at least in this life, and I hoped it would remain so. As for politics, this opening ceremony was a rather politically charged one.

There were members of almost every political faction within the Mandalore sector present. I spotted my handmaiden, Morson catching up with her father, the nomad leader of New Gargon Trinity. Glancing away, to avoid joining that conversation, I saw that in another corner, Vai and Tabbi were having a conversation with the leader of Harswee, Tabbi's father. Judging by the blush on Vai's face, they were probably revealing that they were actually dating or something of that nature. It wasn't my business, and I wasn't going to get involved in it.

Even the Jakelians, who reminded me of Tolkien's elves, are present. Although, it's only their son and daughter, not the actual king that is attending. Also, a representative from Concord Dawn, who was looking rather annoyed at the whole event.

And of course, the Patriarch of Clan Ordo who is also having a chat with what appeared to be the leader of some of the mining worlds that had major overrepresentation on the political scene for their smaller population, with Korkie who I know paid several state visits to Ordo last year. Last week, I received a curious comm message from Ms. Ikudtovu Ordo. Apparently, Korkie's regular state visits to Ordo had attracted her interest in our family. The message was written entirely in Mandoa - so I had to confirm the contents with Vai to verify it; it was an oblique question about Korkie and *my* riduurok's status, or marriageability. Obviously, I turned her down, for both our sakes.

The Ordo clansmen are all wearing various clothing representing their planets. A few of them are even so daring as to wear armor. The Jakelians are wearing simple breastplates underneath their rather poofy clothing.

The Clan Kregg Patriarch is currently wearing a cape over his armor. He was also surrounded by a group of very overdressed old men and women that I vaguely remembered as the other major clan leaders on Harswee. Despite the constant clan fighting on Harswee it seems the group is still more comfortable hanging around each other rather than mingling with the rest of the Mandalorians of other worlds.

The Morson Patriarch had a rather nice looking fur coat, but is definitely wearing a solid plate underneath it. The only ones who are not wearing armor are a faction near the back of the large Royal Court, who are wearing red uniforms that reminded me more of Mao, or even Stalin's style. Instead of it being an unflattering gray pants and suit, they are wearing red suits with skirts that were rather flattering.

Something about them was triggering my "keep an eye on them" alarm, but I can't pinpoint it yet. There was a general oddness, though, like the fact that the vast majority of the delegation are all female, with only one male amongst them. They also seemed to be gathered very closely to what I guessed is their leader, a black-haired woman in her early 30s, I estimated.

Really, I would have ignored them and focused on my own party, except they kept glancing towards my general direction. If you do that enough, you're going to notice when someone's doing it. Why were they interested in me? I didn't like it one bit.

But beyond that, I was pleased to notice a general pro-armor theme to the festivities. Usually, the Royal Palace is a fortress, all armor and weapons were banned for visitors and guests. Only security staff and the Royal Guard had a license to be armed on the Palace grounds.

Strangely enough, earlier today, the rule that had kept armor off the property had been reversed. Instead, they just emphasized no weapons being allowed on the property, probably the reason why several people were not wearing their vambraces along with their armor.

Why that had been done, I wasn't aware, but I assumed it was to help with the political situation. After all, trying to keep every potential warlord in the Mandalore sector happy would be a lot easier if they felt like they were welcome in the Royal Palace.

My thoughts were interrupted as I heard someone step up next to me. I was still absentmindedly scanning the individuals in attendance.

"Representative Kryze." Governor Pre Vizsla said as he nodded to me.

I nodded back and said, "Governor Vizsla, it's good to see you again." He was dressed in a business suit instead of armor, unlike his political rivals. I wondered what kind of message he was sending with that choice, and to whom.

"Yes, it's been too long. The last time I think we had a conversation was just before you headed off to the center of the galaxy in Coruscant. You've been doing good work for Mandalore and its people there."

"Thank you, Governor." I said with a nod, sipping the glass of champagne that had been offered to me by one of the servers hired for this event. "But I'm only doing what I can to help Mandalore reach its full potential."

Pre chuckled at that before saying, "Your results speak for themselves. Though I do wonder why you got involved in that little scuffle with the CIS a few months back."

I nodded and said, "A friend in need. Padmé Amidala has been my friend and mentor in the Senate... It goes against everything I believe to allow politics to transform into a personal vendetta against a single individual. The Trade Federation went much too far to hire a rogue agent, *a fellow Mandalorian*, to assassinate her. I had to intervene."

"Ah yes, Jango Fett." Pre said with a nod before saying, "You can understand that I've been trying to keep my distance from that man. Our families have had not-so-good relations in the past."

"Well, considering that Clan Vizsla was involved in the Mandalorian Civil War, if memory serves, it is understandable that he would not view Clan Vizsla in a favorable light. I would like to say I'm sure he has no ill will towards the greater clan, as it were, but then I'd probably be lying. Making assumptions like that is dangerous, and it's always good to play it by ear."

"Exactly." Pre said with a nod. "That's the main reason I'm keeping my distance from him, even though I am quite interested in this Clone Army he helped train for the Republic."

I nodded my head at that. I was somewhat interested in that as well. Over the last few months, I had researched everything I could without actually talking to Jango Fett. I haven't had a chance to, as he's been preoccupied with his sister.

And to be fair, it's probably for the best that I did keep my distance for that time. I had strong-armed him into damaging his credibility, so I might as well give him a few months of not having to deal with me. But we needed to have a talk about what those clones represented sooner or later, and possibly not as Tanya the Mandalorian Representative, but as White Silver. Apparently, a large section of the staff that he had brought in to train the clones on Kamino had wandered off once the army was officially put into service.

Some are still helping, but the majority have simply taken up other jobs, seeing their contract has been concluded. Which means the Cloners are in the market for new trainers, and though they are heavily hiring bounty hunters from across the galaxy, some of those bounty hunters are coming from Mandalore. A few had even been asked to come from the mercenary company Vai had set up in my name on Gargon.

I am considering allowing that. After all, allowing clones to be trained by Mandalorians would probably help them survive the war better, as well as share some insights into the Clone Army itself. However, there was also the inherent problem of having clones trained by Mandalorians.

Mandalorians are not a bloodline; we aren't a people. We are a creed, a culture, which meant the possibility that these clones would come to Mandalore when the war is over and try to set up their lives here is a very real possibility. Theoretically, it should not be a problem, but it's also theoretically possible that genetic cousins becoming more common would be a problem as the years went on.

I have other options, though, as Tanya the Representative. The Jedi had quite a lot of planets under their control when you looked into their information, specifically temples throughout the galaxy. The temples could easily be expanded on, letting the clones have farmland throughout the galaxy after the war and allowing them to do with that land as they pleased.

Of course, I would need the cooperation of the Jedi and Chancellor Palpatine for that plan, and I still needed to write it up into a more efficient document rather than simply stating, "Jedi have land, clones need land, here's the answer."

Yes, that was a simplistic answer, and it would not hold up well under the scrutiny of the Senate. Someone would find something wrong with it, they always do, unless I found every piece of evidence to make it as long-lasting and as good an option as possible.

But that line of thought is for another time. Turning to Pre, I said, "Well, if you're worried about Jango Fett being an issue, I would suggest possibly building a relationship with the man. Showing that not all Vizslas are the same, even in a long-term sense, might be the best way to keep him from assuming such. A holo conversation here, a letter there, perhaps even offer him land on Concordia to live on free of charge as recompense for what he and his family suffered at your relatives' hands. It's not much, but it would probably do a lot toward smoothing over relations between your clans."

Pre nodded slowly and seemed to have a moment of introspection before saying, "You know, that might not be such a bad idea. There's plenty of land on Concordia. If he wishes to set up a farmstead there, it would be easy to accommodate the man."

"Not to mention, since he has his own ship, he can easily transport between Concordia and Mandalore, where his sister is receiving medical rehabilitation." I pointed out.

Pre nodded at that before saying, "I will look into that then. I was quite impressed with your non-violent resolution to the Amidala affair. I might take a page from your book. It seems like a reasonable way to defuse any potential situations between us."

I nodded my head and said, "Good luck with that, then. If the former leader of the True Mandalorians and the family of the former leader of Death Watch can break bread with each other, it would do a lot for improving the outlook of the Mandalore sector."

Pre nodded his head at that and was about to say something when a couple of musical instruments alerted us to the start of the celebration.

All eyes turned towards the large doors that led to the rest of the Royal Palace, situated at the front of the room and adorned with artwork depicting ancient Mandalorians in their cloak-like armor.

The doors opened, and there were no longer just those in the room wearing the cloak-like armor. In walked Satine, wearing possibly the most formal and ceremonial version of Mandalorian armor I think I had ever seen. However the fact that Duchess Satine, the head of the New Mandalorian movement, is wearing Mandalorian armor at all is something that many people would have bet to be impossible, like seeing the tooth fairy or pigs fly.

The room literally went as quiet as a graveyard as Satine walked down the central carpet, wearing a proverbial armored gown that seemed to pay homage to the ancient Mandalorians, and yet she wore no helmet. Her hair was made up in a rather fancy way, and she was smiling as she seemed to be the center of attention.

Adorned in the colors of blue, green, and a little bit of purple, her standard coloration, the armor also followed suit. A quick look revealed that there were no weapons on it, at least none that were physically visible, and there was quite a bit of impressive armor work integrated into the material as I noticed it passing me.

As she is familiar with Mandalorian color theory, I surmised that Aunt Satine had probably given the Clan Armorer a new job to work on.

Satine finished her walk by sitting down on the throne at the end of the hallway. She was still smiling as she said, "Please, take a seat." as she indicated the many seats that were around the royal hall.

"Well, this is a surprise to be sure." Pre said with a broad smile before, he gave me a nod and walked off, finding his own seat near the Concordia delegation.

For myself, I quickly rallied the members of my party: Vai, Morson, Tabbi, Ordo, and the others-to a set of seats near the center area.

There's quite a large crowd now trying to find their own seats, making a bit of headroom for the camera crew that I had not noticed before in the corner. They are apparently filming and taking pictures with a camera drone. Is this live? I would rather hope it wasn't, considering this is a

surprise to everyone, but if Satine is going to announce some new policy change about armor, this is the way to do it.

Once everyone was in position, Satine cleared her throat and said, "I imagine this is all a very big surprise for all of you. After all, one of the hardline policies of the New Mandalorians is the removal of militarism from our culture. Armor being the prime example of our culture's militarism."

"But... over the last few years, there have been many people who have found ways to view our armor not as an example of the military traditions that built our society, but more as the protective nature it was meant to have.

Some have shown this new nature through song and dance, as the Gargons have done, while others have shown the economic value through the trade of armor to planets that need such protection to fight slavery and criminals. These are good things that our knowledge and armor have been used for that are not, in their own way, militarism or used to hurt others for our benefit. Thus, I find it hypocritical to continue the longstanding orders of banning all armor in the capital districts of Sundari. There is room in the New Mandalorian way for armor, and as a result, I have had this commissioned."

She held up her hands to show off the impressive ceremonial garb. "There's not a single weapon within this metal; it is only for protection. I don't intend to wear this every day, but I figured that for the announcement of this change in the rules, it would be best for me to step up and show another way armor can be used in a non-military manner. This was crafted using materials from across the Mandalorian sector under the steady hand of Clan Kryze's armorer, who has generously allowed the filming of the creation of this armor. A documentary has been created and will be released in the near future that will also explain some of the new methods that are being created for the sector on how to use armor without intending to cause harm.

Wearing armor for protecting ourselves is acceptable under New Mandalorian teachings. In this way, we are able to protect ourselves and get out of dangerous situations thanks to this armor. As long as you create armor that does not have any weapons that can cause harm, it is legally allowed within the city. There's even precedent for this that goes further back than New Mandalorian ways.

Ancient ancestors of Mandalore, the Ta'ung, did not allow weapons to be built into their armor, as they view it as unsporting behavior. Though there are some differences in why we don't want weapons in our armor, the precedent stays the same. They believed their armor should only be used for protection, not for harm, and I believe we can agree with them on this. We should return to a traditional understanding of armor as a protection mechanism, not as a weapon."

"What about the helmet?" Someone called from the audience, getting a few chuckles from, I believe, the more pro-armor sections of the crowd and a smile from Satine.

"I have a helmet created as well, but a helmet means something different from the armor, in my opinion. At least, for my own interest in the subject recently. To wear a helmet is a proclamation of being prepared for war. Though I have a helmet that matches this armor, I think I shall not take it up unless it is necessary."

Looking around, I saw that at least from the perspective of the Mandalorian leader and the sector, it seemed to have been a resounding success, as most of the people were either nodding their heads in agreement or seemed happy enough with what Satine was proposing. Satine might have just played her cards exactly right, at least among the leadership throughout the sector. We had yet to see how this would play with some of the more grounded people across the planets.

Kalevala, for instance, had been the center of New Mandalorian culture for a long time and had grown a distrust of anything even remotely related to militarism. The simple fact that someone had leaked the possibility that the ship under construction in their spaceport could be retrofitted quickly into a carrier had nearly seen the end of all construction. It took a little bit of extra money, greasing some palms, to get it back underway.

How the people of Mandalore would fare with that was something to wait and see. Hopefully, most of the population are more accepting of the idea of armor nowadays. Just releasing the restrictions on the central areas of the city, where they had been the most stringent, would probably not affect the outer districts.

It is a wait-and-see moment on that one. Then, hopefully, nothing terrible would come of this. The only ones I saw that had any negative feelings toward this appeared to be Prime Minister Almec, who looked disturbed, and the leader of the Red faction over there... No, it couldn't be who I thought they were, could it? That would be incredibly brazen of them. How did they even get past the security? Hasn't Satine heeded my warning about them? Shaking my head, I ignored that thought and noticed that their leaders seemed unhappy about the whole thing, though they hadn't spoken up just yet.

"Well, that's enough about me and my own efforts to hold Mandalore together. This broadcast is going out to the whole sector, and I think it's about time for it to come to an end. There are plenty of festivities going on throughout the city. Just find one you enjoy and have fun. While the galaxy may be at war, we are working tirelessly to make our sector prosper, and we always will be." With that, the camera crew stopped filming, as I could see the red light on their cameras ending, and Satine stood up, walking down from her throne to speak with the other nobility and leadership. Propaganda paparazzi were all over the place, taking pictures and asking various individuals for their opinion. One young woman with silver hair was trying to push her way through the crowd in my general direction, probably wanting to ask the niece of the Duchess her opinion on all this.

Well, I didn't have time for that. Instead, I told Vai, "Cover me. Ordo, Tabbi, with me." All of them gave a nod as they did as I instructed. Vai moved between me and the paparazzi to prevent any

talking as I made my way through the Royal Hall to the back section of the room where the red individuals were standing, the two Royal Guards at my side as I did.

As I made my way there, the queen bee of the red individuals looked up and smiled. "Ah, good evening, Princess." the woman said with a bow and a Russian accent a mile wide.

"Good evening," I said, my left eye twitching a bit as I looked across the rather young party followers that crowded around a plain looking middle aged woman. "I'm sorry, I recognize most of the people here at this event, yet I have no idea who you are."

The woman smiled before saying, "Oh, just a leader from just outside the Mandalore sector, Anteevy, I hope you've heard of us."

My hand would have gone to a blaster pistol if I had one. Unfortunately, no weapons were allowed, not even I had one on me at this moment. "Yes I have, one of your people tried to kill me a couple of months ago."

"Oh yes, an unfortunate thing. An overzealous officer; she went too far and broke several laws in doing so, she is now being punished for that transgression of attacking royalty of a sovereign nation." The woman made a clicking noise with her tongue before saying, "It's not right. The only way to win the revolution is through peaceful coexistence while presenting a shining example of progress and prosperity that inspires other people to our glorious cause."

"Ah huh... So, your statement is basically that she was a rogue agent and not to worry about it."

"Correct, my dear." the woman said, standing up to her full height, which was somewhat taller than me. "The only way to make a proper revolution is through *love*, not war."

Something about the way she said that sent a shiver down my spine. I had to clench my fists not to show how discomfoting she was. Not to mention, the look in her eye was like a predator on the hunt.

Shrugging it off, I simply said, "Well, there's not much war in this sector nowadays, though I do wonder about some of these statements your comrade was making, the one who tried to kill me. Are you sure you're not anti-monarchy?"

"Hmm, my dear, let me tell you, we are not anti-monarchy; we're anti-clan, since it seems to be a structure by which those higher ups who would abuse those without a clan can easily identify them and the lesser clans that can be bullied. We do not value monarchy as a system of government for ourselves, but we are not anti-monarchy should that monarchy support and defend the workers of the galaxy. If you were to wish to learn about the glorious revolution and our communist thought, I would gladly teach you the ways of our people."

She put her hand on my shoulder, and I just felt like my skin was crawling. There was definitely something not well in those eyes-something dark and yearning hidden behind the intent of that statement.

Shaking the hand off my shoulder, I stepped back and said, "I'm afraid I have no interest in learning about communism. I've learned quite a bit about it already," and started to turn.

"Oh... and where did you learn that? What school of thought is it that has taught you everything you need to know about our beliefs? Was it the doctrine of Hivism? Tayan socialist thought? Both are distinct from the ideology of Anteevy."

"Simple, I read an economics book once," I mused, wanting to leave the proximity of this woman.

"I've read one or two myself, Miss Kryze, and let me tell you, economics books tell a lot of interesting lies, a lot of them, and not a lot of truths."

I turned and raised an eyebrow at her before saying, "You could say that about any book. I guess the only way to find out what system would work is to observe what's working in the current system out there in the real world. From what I've seen, capitalism seems to work quite well in restoring the Mandalorian sector."

"Does it? Sure looks to me like most of the problems that are being fixed are through state-run enterprises, either federal or lower levels. Currently, isn't the terraforming on Mandalore being paid for by the federal state of Mandalore while being conducted by the Ithorian central state council?"

"Theoretically," I said, "you are right, though the state would not have the income it did without a properly functioning market with a healthy capitalist class."

"But who's going to stop those capitalists from going too far? Capitalism requires a stratified society; a stratified society is a contradiction, what keeps the poor from eating the rich? Violence and the threat of it. That Gerr fellow, the *False Silver*, like many others before him, believed putting slave collars on the population and forcing them to work in his factories was the solution to it. Slavery, a solution to the contradictions of Capitalism..." The woman clicked her tongue several times before saying, "Capitalism is quite a dangerous tool when it gets out of hand, don't you think?"

"Any economic system would be prone to abuse if allowed to get out of hand. That's why the state exists in the first place: to be a watchdog, to enforce the rules that society deems necessary for civilization to continue."

"Isn't that what we are doing? Enforcing the rules that society determines are necessary for civilization to continue? We have not abandoned the concept of currencies like the Garn, nor do

we restrict the exchange of personal property. Anteevy has a thriving market without a disruptive capitalist class."

She isn't wrong if you go by the leftist definitions, though I had quite a few histories worth of information that showed that it didn't exactly work. It never stuck to a singular definition, be it Chinese or Russian; it always shifted, changed to suit the needs of the people in power and thus the entire system fell to corruption and secret police to hold the state together. I am not so ignorant of general communist claptrap that I did not notice the bait and switch. The use of the term 'personal property' was merely a ploy by communists to seize the private property of honest people. It allowed the communists to shift what things a person was allowed to own endlessly until eventually nothing was left.

Shaking my head, I finally said, "That is a point of view that I may consider someday." Wanting to be nice and end the conversation as quickly as possible seemed to have been the wrong choice, though.

She simply smiled and said, "If you ever want to learn more, our people are always more than willing to allow a noble to learn how communism really works. But until then," she turned to face the head of the room, "I guess I have to go meet and greet with your aunt now, don't I? I was not expecting this whole change in the armor, though. I believe that is the wrong course of action. All you're doing by strapping the armor to yourself is showing that you're going to fight someday. I'm pretty sure most of the population will think of that too." she mused with a saccharine grin on her face before walking past me.

While I obviously would rather Communism die of starvation, if I do meet that Communist again, I would need to be better prepared to win that debate and steer people away from that dead end ideology. However, if she is right, some people will take the wrong message about the armor the wrong way and she could find allies amongst the civilian population from them, people who were against the military and might be willing to give information to the communists.

I shivered, as the fear of the Red Scare could be just as dangerous as the Reds themselves, turning a population against their government. I would need to keep a close eye on these communists to make sure they didn't take control through internal collapse.

Writers note: Wait, what hell? Didn't we get a chapter out last week? How did this happen? Well whatever. Begun, the cultural festival has. We have some relatives, some people talking, Korkie being Korkie, and Pre plotting his next move, along with some unexpected guests... What does this mean? No idea! Guess we will find out next time, that should take me 2 weeks. YOU BETTER NOT PROVE ME WRONG EDITOR TEAM!?

Editor's Note: ๐๓๓

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