

Sithmas Spirits

Written by: Kah'ri Marru



Asher Muuray sat quietly at his desk filing paperwork from his most recent mission. Most ISB agents found this part of the job the most tedious and much preferred fighting the pirates that he recently recovered a Sith artefact from. Asher, however, never really cared one way or another. To him it was just part of the job – a necessity to ensure the Empire remained unyielding in its authority. No records meant no intelligence after all.

As evening drew on, the records hall became more and more empty, agents and archivists, alike, returning to their dormitories for the night.

“Goodnight Lieutenant Muuray,” A rookie agent called. “Hope to see you at tomorrow's Sithmas party.”

Asher never looked up from his documents but heard the rookie's peers mocking him for the invitation. In his honest opinion, they were quite right to. Muuray had not been to a Sithmas party in years and had no intentions to go to this one. The only thing that mattered was the next mission.

Night had fully fallen when the senior agent finished and submitted his reports in the archivist drop box. Surveying the room, he noticed only one more agent still present – Also filling out some forms. The two exchanged a brief nod and Asher removed himself to his barracks.

His room, lit only by a single sconce on the far wall, conformed to every Imperial standard. His bed was made as tightly as it had been during his days in training, when he first learned to do it correctly. His thoughts went over the day's activities, recounting a particular feeling he had when he'd recovered the Sith artefact. He paused at the memory for a moment before shaking his head and dispelling the mental image. *Just another day.* Asher thought to himself, as he lay

down. Unbeknownst to him, this Sithmas Eve would be different from the ones he'd seen so far. He steadied his breathing and very calmly fell asleep. It would only be for a short while, though.

The sound of klaxons blaring flooded his room. Asher's eyes flung open at once and his body moved to action. As he rushed through the hallways, he noted the absence of personnel. Had no one heard the alarms? He flew through the corridors, looking into rooms as he passed. It was as if everyone had vanished. Everyone, that is, except for a single young man in an agent's uniform who seemed to be trying to put out a fire in the mess hall.

Instantly naming the fire as the reason for the alarms. Asher grabbed a nearby fire extinguisher and began doing what the young agent could not. In a few moments, the fire was put out and the young agent gleefully thanked the other man. Asher wasn't listening. His mind was spinning with unanswered questions. The most important of which stared him in the face.

Asher looked at the younger man in astonishment. It was him. The young man was Asher Muurray from close to seven years ago. "Who are you?" The senior agent barked, choosing to deny the obvious. The young man stood at attention. "Ash Muurray, Sir! Radio operator in the Surveillance Division, Sir!" He recited loudly before shifting his posture once more. "And also the ghost of your past."

"My past?" The senior agent asked. "How is this possible?"

"Who cares?" The young man said in a singsong voice. "It is. Now let's get on with it."

"Get on with what?"

"My! Lots of questions. You would think I would be the more curious of the two of us."

The older Asher stared silently.

"Well. It's a bit much to explain. I wonder where to even begin . . ." The young man pondered to himself for a moment. "Quite right," he said, turning as if to reply to someone else. "From the beginning then . . ."

Ash pulled a remote from his belt and pressed a button. The mess hall around him began to flow backwards. The flames that he put out erupted and dissolved, people filed in and out, walking backwards the entire time. Asher gaped at the scene as years went by and unfolded once more. The young agent smiled at him before pressing the button again. The mess hall stopped on a scene from long ago. Sithmas decorations filled the room and people gathered in small groups – many around tables, some in huddles, and some around the Sithmas tree.

"36 ABY. The year- "

"The year I joined the ISB."

“Correct!” the young man cheered. “This was your first Sithmas with the ISB. There you are over there!” He pointed toward the Sithmas tree where the younger Asher stood with three other men, drinking some form of hot ale.

“That's me?” He asked, watching the small group of men burst into laughter over something one of them said.

“Yep. You were a lot more fun back then - even had friends! Look there! Remember Charlie?”

“Yes.” The senior agent said sombrely. “He died in a spice raid. Two years from now.”

“And there! It's Nome! *She* was great fun.” He winked, jabbing his elbow into the older man.

A sad look washed over Asher's face as he remembered. “Why are you showing me these things?” The older man asked.

“To remind you.”

“Remind me *what*?” Asher's voice became sharp.

“That once upon a time you had fun.”

Asher looked back at the scene with a sneer.

“. . . And then I grew up.” He said obstinately.

“Yes, losing friends does tend to do that to a man. However, I'm not convinced that you'd be the man who you are now without having them in your life.”

Asher stared at the friends he once knew, bitterness simmering inside his belly. Pushing down emotions he thought to have killed off years ago, he stormed out of the mess hall, the young man chasing after him.

“Wait! We weren't done.” He said in a whiny voice.

“Well, I am.” Ashley responded coldly.

“No – you're – not.”

The voice he heard had changed – grown up, in one sense – and held the exact same coldness that he had just given. Asher turned around to see a mirror reflection of himself.

“/ decide when you're done, Lieutenant.” The reflection commanded. “You are to report to the junior agents' barracks immediately.”

Asher began to speak but was cut off.

“I said now, Lieutenant!” Barked the reflection loudly.

Asher and his reflection both walked down the corridors to where the junior agents' barracks were. Light and laughter broke from the room into the otherwise dark and cold hallway. Asher looked back at his companion as if to ask if he really had to go in there. The reflection said nothing and gestured to the room. Upon entering, they found a scene like the one before: Four men surrounded a table, all drinking hot ale. The difference, however, was that he recognised only one of the four men as the rookie who asked him to the Sithmas party the previous evening.

"I still can't believe you've invited him, Judd." Said one man.

"To Juddeo Downbon!" Another said, holding up his drink. "The only one in the entire ISB daft enough to invite Lieutenant Muuray to a party." The three men burst into laughter over this. The rookie simply smiled softly.

"I just think everyone deserves to have a happy Sithmas. Even an Ugnought like Muuray." Judeo said.

"If it were up to 'an Ugnought like Muuray,' there wouldn't *be* a Sithmas." The first man mocked. "I bet he even hated it as a child."

"Well, points to you for trying, anyway." The third man said, patting Juddeo's shoulder.

Asher couldn't help but agree with them. If it *were* up to him, there would be no more Sithmas.

"They're right," he said.

"Keep watching," the reflection responded coldly.

The first man finished taking a drink and slammed his cup down on the table.

"Points nothing! Don't get me wrong, Judd. I know you were well-intentioned. But nothing good could come from the Lieutenant at a Sithmas party. He'd drag the whole atmosphere down!"

"Right!" The second man laughed. "He'd come in all 'This is a violation of section 351.7B of the Imperial Sanction for Social Gatherings' or some garbage like that."

"And then he would confiscate all of the gifts and detain anyone who continued in the festivities." Said the first man again.

The third man agreed, and Juddeo even looked conflicted in his thoughts on this.

That hurt Asher more than he expected it to. True enough, he didn't care about the holiday. But he never stopped anyone else from enjoying them.

"Where would they even get that idea?" He asked the reflection.

"From you . . ." it responded.

Suddenly, flashes of Asher reprimanding junior agents and other subordinates appeared before them. With each image the Lieutenant felt an instinctive indignation which was overpowered by a pang of guilt. He turned to the reflection to ask what he should do, but it had changed forms once more. Now standing before him in the dark hallway was a hooded figure.

The figure said nothing as it waved his hand and the environment around them changed. They were now in the briefing hall where troopers and agents lined up in formation before a podium. Puzzled, Asher turned to the hooded figure who pointed an old, craggily finger toward a man at the podium. The man spoke:

"Today we honour the fallen members of our ranks who perished during the events last week on Seraph. To memorialise that loss is to memorialise the weakness of the Empire, an action, of which I am certain, none who have fallen would want us to take. However, so that we may acknowledge their bravery and sacrifice, we shall display a list of names here for the next hour. After this hour has elapsed, the list will be destroyed, and we will continue rebuilding. May their sacrifices not be in vain. Long live the Empire."

After the speaker had said this, everyone in the room left without so much as a peek at the list. Still puzzled, Asher followed the hooded figure as it glided toward the list and pointed to a single entry. It read: *'Captain Asher Muuray – Deceased'*. The situation dawning on him, Asher stepped back, away from the list and looked around at the empty room. It meant nothing, his death. To anyone. Fear of this day brought an awareness to his actions. No one had cared because *he* had cared about no one.

"What must I do to change this?" He begged the hooded figure. The figure gave no response, but again, stuck out a finger and pointed. An image formed in the middle of the room. It showed the four friends that he had, including Charlie and Nomel. Asher understood. If he was to avert this future, he would need to care about people; People he might lose and pain he might endure. He had to open himself up to that again and let himself feel it all.

At once, klaxons began to blare. Asher looked around for a moment in panic before returning to the hooded figure. It nodded at him, then reached out to touch Asher on the forehead, putting him to sleep.

Asher's eyes flung open at once as alarms filled his dormitory. Moving to action he noted stormtroopers running through the hallways.

"You there!" he shouted out of one of the stormtroopers. "What is today?"

"It's Sithmas Day, Lieutenant." The storm trooper responded, now standing at attention.

"What's going on?"

"There's a fire in the mess hall, Sir."

"There's a fire in the m-?" The Lieutenant repeated. The irony was not lost on him. "Well, come on then! Best not let those Sithmas decorations burn up," Asher said as they began to run.

Coming to the mess hall, Asher spotted Judeo who was trying to put out the fire. Quick as he could, Asher grabbed a nearby fire extinguisher and ran. In a few moments, the fire was put out and the young man winced in anticipation of a reprimand. But he did not get one. He looked up at the Lieutenant, who was smiling as he appraised Judeo's person.

"Sir?" He asked.

"Glad to see you're alright. Pity about the decorations, though." Asher said, looking at the burned streamers and garlands. "Come! Here, sit. I'll get you something to drink."

The young agent, staring on in disbelief, came to his senses and cried out. "But Lieutenant! What about the incident report?"

Asher Muuray smiled at the young man.

"It'll be there later."