*“Old Friends”*

***The Broken Spoke Cantina***

***Judecca***

The stench of spoiled ale, desperation, and wafting opium smoke filled the lungs of Zagro Fenn as he sat awaiting his guest in a plush corner booth. The Hapan was familiar with dens like this. He had spent his adolescence in Hutt Space and Nar Shaddaa was the closest thing he had to a home for many years after being forced from the capital of the Hapes Consortium.

Strega the Hutt was on time for once. “How very uncommon for her,” thought Fenn. The Krath sat his bottle of ale down on the translucent table and arched his shoulders against the high bench seats of his familiar booth. Eyeing the bartender, Zagro motioned for the female Twi’Lek to bring another bottle of ale and an additional glass. The bartender dutifully sent over the bottle as Fenn reached into his robe for his Andros pouch and needle. He began to draw the illegal substance when a wet, clammy, feminine Hutt hand came upon his wrist.

“Friend, it has been a long time. You should have been done with that vice a long time ago,” sternly warned the Hutt.

“Strega the Hutt. I am not used to giving you that honorific. Fully indoctrinated cartel member now? How far we have come since running guns together and selling information to the highest bidder,” stated Zagro.

The female Hutt laughed a guttural laugh, sinister to all not inculcated in Huttesse. Fenn had learned the language long ago, Strega had taught him well. “And you Zag? I do not dare to know what outfit you are with these days. Once my associate, then a Hapan Royal Navy officer, then an Intelligence Operative, and now…this...”Strega looked straight into her friend’s eyes.

Old friends caught up on their youthful days and fresh adventures. They both drank deeply of the ale and looked fondly on each other. This friendship was more than passing. It was the friendship born of childhood and wildness. Of unbridled joys and potential. How the galaxy had aged them, neither spoke.

“The back table? Defensible and an easy escape route. Do you truly not trust me? The only table with a clear glass so no one can get the drop on you. Do you have no faith?” asked Strega.

Fenn sighed heavily and smiled the famous Hapan smile at the female. “Strega, I once trusted my life to your hands. You spoke on my behalf to the cartel and allowed me to operate in Hutt Space as an associate. I can never repay you for that. But trust is a quality I can no longer enjoy. I fear neither can you.”

It was the Hutt’s time to sigh. “Very well Zag, I will not waste your time. You owe the Cartel 500,000 credits. Consider this interest on the years we protected you and turned the blind eye to your slicing and deceit. My masters always adored your skills, however, since you are still breathing. We knew all along, when you returned to us, you were working for your people. I admired you for returning home, matriarchal societies always are a novelty to Hutts. To see other societies where women can wield such power. In my age I tend to overanalyze now. Not so in our youth. Anyway, you will deliver a shipment of Andros to this sector and ensure it gets offloaded. These…people…here know no vice. Profits can be tidy. Offload and start collections for us amongst your new ‘friends’ or we will kill you. Make no mistake, Zag, you are in the Cartel’s employ now. Make that, my employ.,” stated Strega.

Fenn rose to his feet and wrapped his arms around the bulbous head and shoulders of the slender Hutt. They parted company and as Fenn made it to the doorway. He held himself against the wall and almost let out a soft whimper. So goes youth so goes friendship as does love.

The Judecca skyline was darker and more constrictive than Fenn ever imagined it could be. Age will tarnish all things he mused. The Hapan knew not whom he was betraying and whom he was being loyal to in this double edged game.