

Winter Holidays

Rhace Tarrin, #13358

It had been a long time since Rhace had even had occasion to celebrate Life Day. Once in the Imperial military, such trivia was meaningless; you served, you fought, you performed your duty even on days off. Here, however, surrounded by the Arconan military forces and the crew of the Nighthawk, things were drastically different - while still a fully-functional military vessel, celebration was key to the ship's coherency and unity. People got drunk together, people fought and laughed and hurt together. People celebrated in their own ways as they came together, but nonetheless things essentially came down to the fact that this place was vastly different to what the operative was used to. The Empire had been strict. Arcona was considerably less so.

Most of the crew had been given a night, by will of the Captain, to celebrate together down in this ship's mess hall. Kegs of beer and plenty of other drinks had been brought along as the ship rested in drydock so that the crew could either head out and celebrate with their families back on Selen or they could stay with the ship's crew and party through a great night of rest and relaxation... and likely drunken shenanigans, if certain people had their way. Certain people, naturally, referred to the entire command crew and half of the main operating crew of the vessel. It tended to be that way in House Galeres - work hard, play harder. Rhace got along with the crew for that reason, for the most part; their work ethic was intense but they also knew how and when to kick back.

The Nighthawk was a bustling hub of activity, where the newly-minted Lieutenant Colonel was getting dressed in his quarters for the party coming up. His outfit was a gift from his closest friend Emily, who now served the Brotherhood as the Praetor to the Herald - one that he had seen ahead of time and maybe even requested a little something for. A beautiful vest of white with almost knee-high boots, black sleeves and more importantly the long flowing shoulder-pinned cloak he'd asked for. After all, he had to be stylish when going places.

A few final adjustments in the mirror. Perfect. Rhace looked great.

A sharp rap at the door indicated the presence of someone waiting for him. The familiar voice of the ship's Executive Officer, Mako Henymory, could be heard behind it. "Rhace? It's time. Let's go."

"Just a second, XO."

It gave him pause to think. In the Empire, he would never have considered attending an event like this-- if they even held one. These were traditionally fancy affairs, if anything, with tall champagne glasses, dress uniforms and high society conversation, only one of which he was actually familiar with. The sniper couldn't help but think about that, too.

Years of his life had gone by without celebrating holidays; his birthday was a side-note, Life Day barely even a thought when he could not spend it with his family. Almost every time a celebration came up, he was on deployment somewhere that he could not communicate to family or friends. The joys of being a high-level operative for the Empire meant that secrecy was key. Secrets and lies were the centre of his life for a reason, after all. Rhace had known this when he went into sniper school and even when he'd taken up the arts of advanced operating. He hadn't really thought about his birthday or Life Day in years. Things were a little... messy, when you looked at it like that. Nobody should have had to miss out on holidays. Was the sacrifice he'd made to his lifestyle worth it? Absolutely. He would not be the person he *wanted* to be without being in the Empire's sniper school, learning how to put a blaster bolt between someone's eyes at a kilometre with his eyes half closed. He wouldn't know how precisely to put a knife in someone's back effortlessly, slice a terminal and sneak through an enemy compound undetected, either. Life was a little like that for him.

Whatever. He straightened his cloak a little. All of that was gone. He was no longer Imperial, he was Arconan. Arconan traditions mattered more when surrounded by your friends. That, really, was what yhe'd learned; to celebrate holidays with the friends and family that you had made. These people had all welcomed him in, taught him that a little camaraderie on the battlefield and on the ship was considerably better than sitting in the ivory tower of loneliness at the peak of what you wanted to do.

The door slid open. "Come on, man, we don't have all night." Mako's wry smile filled the room with a little more warmth; behind him, as usual, was Lilly. "That looks good, though."

"I know. Gift from Em, as usual."

The only other constant in his life since leaving the Empire was Emily Hune, his Sephi travelling companion; they had ventured the Galaxy and helped him re-learn some of the elements that were part of being *himself*, for a change. Here on the ship he didn't really need to wear the mask of another man as he infiltrated other places; he didn't need to wear the disguises that he had always worn on solo missions into enemy territory. She taught him once again to be himself and *that* was a different thing entirely. Gifts from her were something else, really. Gift-giving was something he'd forgotten how to do entirely. If it wasn't for their few years of taking out targets and travelling, then chances were he wouldn't be a normally-adjusted member of society - just another faceless stormtrooper.

A slight shake of the head threw the detritus of exigence away and Rhace gave his commander a smile. "Let's do this. There's a couple beers with my name on them."

Mako chuckled. "Welcome to the *Nighthawk*, Lieutenant Colonel. There's more than just a couple here. Trust me."

Together, Rhace and Mako made their way down to the ships' mess, where everyone could already hear that Kordath was starting a party without everyone else.