

At just forty years of age Jelahan Kymeri was considered young to hold the rank of Colonel within the Vatali Imperial Navy but as the fourth cousin to the Empress his quick elevation was never questioned. Often overlooked however was the fact that Jelahan was a capable officer and diplomat who had done much in his short life, by Sephi standards at least, to maintain peace within the Empire. And even though his being given this mission had more to do with familial ties than his capabilities he had vowed to his cousin that he would not fail.

He looked across the narrow shuttle aisle at his companion on this endeavour with some fascination. He was easily the largest Human Jelahan had ever seen, his gold coloured armour gleaming in the bright overhead lights. His head was shaved bald though his face was covered in a short neatly trimmed beard, the hair a steel grey colour. Running down the right side of his face were a series of ragged scars that almost begged to tell their story. The large blaster rifle beside him looked old but well cared for.

“So Major, what do you think of Kias?” asked the Sephi in an attempt to pass the time as the shuttle came in for a landing on one of the floating cities above Duro.

Looking across at the Sephi the old Human said “It seems peaceful. It’ll make a nice change of pace from the last few months.” he replied before adding “And please just call me Darro.”

Nodding with a smile Jelahan said “Very well Darro. And yes it is quite peaceful though it wasn’t always so.”

“So I’ve heard. Civil wars are a nasty business.” replied the Mandalorian.

“Oh,” said Jelahan “you sound as though you speak from experience.”

Nodding Darro said “I’ve fought in a few in my time.”

“You must have quite a few tales to tell.” said Jelahan.

Chuckling softly to himself Darro “Yeah I got a few.”

“And the scars.” the Sephi asked pointing to Darro’s face. “If you don’t mind my asking?”

“No it’s fine. A grenade blew up close to my position, this is from the shrapnel.” Darro said as he got a far away look in his eyes.

Jelahan was about to speak when the pilot called back “We’re about to dock with the station Colonel.”

“Thank you Lieutenant.” replied Jelahan.

Darro unclipped his belt and rose to his feet. Pulling on his helmet he said "Time to go work." As the shuttle touched down with a slight bump Darro gestured to the slowly descending boarding ramp and said "After you Colonel."

The pair exited the shuttle to be greeted by a female Duros in a sharp looking business suit. Glancing down at the datapad in her hand she smiled and said "Colonel Kymeri welcome to Bburru Station. If you'd be kind enough to follow me Bana Madak has arranged for a suite in the finest hotel on the station for you and your....companion....to use during your stay."

"My thanks." Jelahan said as he fell in step behind the Duros.

As they strode through the floating city Darro caught bits and pieces of the conversation that passed between the Sephi and the Duros as the majority of his attention was focused on keeping the Colonel, and the rather large amount of credits he carried, safe. Scanning the crowd he could see individuals of a hundred different species all moving about on some business or errand, most simply going about their day to day lives. But even so the old warrior remained vigilant. As they entered a more affluent area of the city something caught Darro's eye for just a moment. It looked like a Sephi though the individual was cloaked in a heavy robe, their face partially covered in shadow but when he looked again they were nowhere to be seen.

Deciding to say nothing for the moment he increased his vigilance until they arrived at the hotel and entered the provided room. After an exhaustive check of the suite Darro removed his helmet and placed it on a side table. Turning to the Sephi Colonel he asked "What are the odds that another Sephi would be on this station?"

"It's not out of the realm of possibility." Jelahan answered. "Why what did you see?" he asked.

"I'm not sure I saw anything. But something doesn't feel right." the Mandalorian answered.

The Sephi asked "What makes you say that?"

"Experience." Darro replied cryptically.

Jelahan frowned but decided not to press any further. Pulling off his uniform coat he said "I'd like to get cleaned up before we meet Madak, would you mind ordering some food? I'm famished."

As the Sephi entered the bathroom Darro walked over to a wall mounted comm unit and punched the button for room service.

"Room service." said the voice on the other end.

"Yeah this is suite 719. Can you send up a couple of steaks or something please." Darro said.

"Right away sir." answered the voice before the line went dead.

Darro sat silently as the minutes slowly ticked by until there was a loud knock at the door. Getting up he opened the door and let a young Rodian push the tray of food into the room as Jelahan emerged from the bathroom toweling his long black hair. That was when it all kicked off. The Rodian reached inside his coat and pulled a small blaster from within its folds, aiming it at the Sephi Colonel.

"Gun!" shouted Jelahan.

Darro sprung into action leaping upon the much smaller Rodian knocking him to the ground. With a vice like grip on the Rodians wrist Darro began to slam his hand into the ground. Once, twice, three times before his grip on the blaster faltered sending the weapon skidding across the carpet to crash into the wall. Darro pulled his Westar-34 from its holster and jammed the cold metal of the barrel hard against the back of the Rodians skull.

Knowing he was beaten the cowardly Rodian shouted "P-p-please don't kill me!"

"Oh you're gonna have to work real hard to stay alive." Darro said menacingly.

Picking up the Rodian's lost weapon Jelahan pointed it at the Rodian and asked "Why have you tried to kill me?"

"I was paid a lot of money." answered the would be assassin.

"By who?" asked Darro. When he didn't answer Darro struck him with the butt of his blaster.

"Oww." cried the Rodian. "A woman, I've never seen her before."

"Where did you meet her?" asked Jelahan.

"She found me." replied the Rodian.

"That's not what he asked." Darro growled.

"In a bar on the lower levels." answered the terrified Rodian.

"What do we do with him?" asked the Sephi.

With a wicked grin Darro said "As much as I'd love to put a blaster bolt through his skull it'd be a shame to damage this nice carpet. Call the authorities, I'll make sure he doesn't move."

Twenty minutes later, and as Duros Security personnel dragged the Rodian away, the Sephi Colonel turned to Darro and asked "How should we proceed?"

"This deal is too important for us to abandon it. But we need to be even more careful." replied Darro.

Nodding the Colonel replied "Agreed. Come on then let's get this over with."

They exited the room and made their way through the hotel towards the front doors the Sephi leading with Darro a step behind him his T-21b ready to fire. They hurried through the streets of the city making their way to the offices of the ship broker Bana Madak. As they entered his lavish looking foyer they were greeted once again by the sharply dressed Duros woman who greeted them with a smile.

"Gentlemen welcome. If you'll follow me to the conference room." she said cheerfully. As they followed her into the room she motioned to a pair of chairs and said "Bana Madak will be with you shortly. Can I get you anything to drink while you wait?"

"No thank you." answered the Sephi while Darro merely shook his head.

The pair waited in silence for several minutes before an extravagantly dressed Duros entered the room with a flourish approaching the Colonel with his hand outstretched. "Colonel Kymeri, such a pleasure to finally meet you in person."

"And you Mr Madak." Jelahan replied as he shook the Duros long fingered hand.

"Please Bana is fine. I trust your stay has been enjoyable so far?" Madak asked.

With a tight smile the Colonel said "Quite." as politely as possible. "If you don't mind Bana I am eager to conclude our business so that I might return home."

"Of course, of course." the Duros said. "As requested two Quasar Fire-Class Cruiser-Carriers and forty T-70 X-Wings are awaiting your arrival in docking bay six three nine and six four zero. You have the funds?"

"Indeed." Jelahan said as he reached into his coat pulling out a small datacard. It amazed Darro that such a small thing could be so valuable.

"One moment please." said Madak as he pushed the card into his datapad. As the funds transferred to his account the command codes for the ships replaced them. As he handed the card back to Jelahan he said "And these are your command codes."

Rising to his feet as he took the data card the Sephi extended his hand and said "A pleasure doing business with you Bana."

"And you my friend, and you." the Duros said as he took the Colonel's hand and shook it vigorously.

As Jelahan left Darro fell in step behind him weapon at the ready. "Let's get back to the shuttle." the Sephi said quietly.

"Agreed." the Mandalorian replied.

They walked quickly through the floating city making their way quickly through the busy streets until, less than a block from the shuttleport, something struck Darro in the side like a runaway ronto. The blow knocked him from his feet sending his rifle flying away and his helmet flying from his head. As he rolled to a stop he could just make out through fuzzy eyes the Colonel and another person engaged in unarmed combat. As he rose on unsteady feet he finally saw what it was that hit him as an abandoned hover car silently floated nearby. Shaking his head to clear the cobwebs he got a clear look at Jelahan's attacker. It was a female Sephi with a lithe athletic build in a figure hugging bodysuit, a wicked looking curved blade in her hand, her face obscured by a mask.

She slashed at the Colonel again and again, the blade barely missing its mark as Jelahan dodged left and right. But he was fighting a losing battle as each strike came closer to hitting the mark. Eventually one did, the blade slicing a long ragged gash along the Colonel's thigh. He dropped to the ground in pain his hands gripping his bleeding thigh in an attempt to staunch the blood loss. As she moved in for the coup de grace Darro charged like a wounded bull tackling her to the ground. He pulled his fist back and punched hoping to drive it through her face but she was too fast and he hit nothing but cold steel.

Before he could react the woman raised a knee up into his groin. Even with his armour the pain was excruciating as his breath exploded from his lungs. As he rolled off her clutching his injured man hood she quickly flipped up onto her feet and approached the still down Sephi Colonel. Pushing the pain down as best he could Darro rose to his feet and shouted "Hey! We're not done yet."

Even though he couldn't see her mouth he knew she was smiling as she twirled the blade in the air. She leapt forward slashing the blade along the old man's ribs, the blow leaving a deep furrow in his armour. Before he could even react the woman spun and unleashed a wicked kick that slammed into his back knocking him slightly off balance. Taking advantage of his momentary loss of balance the woman leapt forward and plunged her blade deep into his side twice in quick succession. Darro grunted in pain as the blade pierced his flesh through a gap in his armour.

But even through the pain he knew that this was probably his one and only chance to get his hands on this would be assassin. He reached out for her wrist clamping his hand around it like a vice yanking her around to face him. Balling his left hand into a fist he coked his arm back and punched her as hard as he could in the face, the blow knocking her mask aside. Her legs buckled and she would have slumped to the ground had it not been for Darro's grip on her wrist. He released her and felt around for the dagger still firmly embedded within his flesh. He pulled it out and threw it to the side where it clattered and skid along the metal floor.

Pulling his Westar-34 from its holster he aimed the weapon at the Sephi woman's head and was about fire when Jelahan screamed "Wait!!"

"Why?" Darro asked confused.

As he looked down at her his face became filled with pain. "She's my sister Nataya." the Colonel replied.

"Then why the hell is she trying to kill us?" Darro asked.

Rubbing his tired looking face Jelahan said "She was a staunch supporter of Vauzem, one of his finest assassins. When he was defeated she disappeared along with him. I can only assume Vauzem learned of my mission here and sent her to stop me."

"I thought this mission was a need to know kind of thing?" Darro asked.

"It was." the Sephi replied. "I fear we may have a spy in midst."

"Then we need to get those carriers back to Kiast now." said the Mandalorian.

Nodding Jelahan said "I agree. Are you able to travel?"

"I'll be fine." Darro answered.

"Are you sure?" the Sephi asked "Because you were hit by a car."

With a weak smile Darro replied "I've been hit by worse." Pointing at the still form of Nataya Darro asked "What do we do with her?"

"She may have valuable information, we should bring her with us." the Colonel answered.

Bending down gingerly Darro scooped up her small form and tossed her over his shoulder he followed the limping Colonel towards the shuttle that had brought them to the station. As they slowly ascended the ramp one of the pilots took Nataya from Darro and bound her wrists and

ankles with strong cables. As the Mandalorian and the Sephi reached their seats they collapsed into them with a sigh.

“Lieutenant get us back to the *Astrayus* as quickly as possible. And tell them to send flight crews to the carrier's, I want them underway ASAP.” Jelahan called forward.

“Roger that Colonel.” answered the pilot.

The shuttle gently lifted off and re-entered the cold void of space on its way back to the *VIN Astrayus*. It was, thankfully, a short flight and as the shuttle touched down and the boarding ramp descended Darro rose to his feet and staggered down to the hangar deck on unsteady feet.

“I don't feel so good.” he mumbled before the world turned black and he fell to the ground with a thump.

Rushing down the ramp as fast as his injured leg would allow Jelahan knelt beside the old Human and shouted “Get him to the med bay now.”

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Some time later Darro woke to find himself staring up at a bright white ceiling, a number of tubes and wires leading from his body to a machine by his bed. He tried to sit up but the pain in his side was excruciating and he fell back.

“You're lucky to be alive.” said a familiar voice from beside him.

Turning his head he saw Jelahan, his leg wrapped in a bandage, sitting beside his bed. “What happened?” Darro asked.

“You collapsed. The doctor said the blade pierced your liver and you were bleeding internally. He managed to repair the damage and you should be fine.” Jelahan replied.

“Great.” Darro said. “How's your sister?” he asked.

“Currently locked up in the brig.” the Sephi replied.

“Sorry I hit her.” Darro said.

Jelahan chuckled and said “No you're not.”

“No I'm really not.” Darro replied.

Placing a hand on the old Humans shoulder the Colonel said "We'll be home soon, get some rest." before he turned to leave the medbay.

"Jelahan." Darro said. As the Sephi stopped and turned Darro said "Thank you."

With a slight bow the Sephi said "You're welcome." before he turned and left.