

We Are the Empire

[Midnight] Fiction Phase 2

By: Mune Cinteroph #3607

The constant pitter-patter of droplets against paved streets filled his ears. It seemed to him the rain had only begun, though the storm had raged for what had some time ago come to felt like forever ago. In rivulets, it ran down his jacket to drip into the puddles he absent mindedly stepped through. It was a miserable start to a mission that could so easily become as miserable itself. He took it on himself, however, alone at that. He recalled clearly the argument that had ensued on that regard.

“Are you insane?!” Elinia snapped.

It had been rare for the hybrid to be target to such anger by one he had for ages called his apprentice. The fury was near palpable. They were all strained to their breaking points, he had known this when he proposed he take on her proffered mission, solo.

“You said it yourself, we need our military at our back.” He had responded evenly.

“Yes! I did state that fact. However...”

“You want a team to go in and negotiate. Possibly sacrificing those numbers over a gamble.” Mune cut her off, though he made sure he kept a calm tone with her. He knew how much this war had grated upon her. The people they had already lost had taken their toll. Images of Sparky, his final push to change the man’s mind even though there had admittedly been no other way. He swallowed around that ball of choking pain that had filled his throat before he continued. “We cannot afford to sacrifice anyone else. You, least of all.”

“And you are dispensable?! Is that it?!”

Mune rested a hand on her shoulder, eyes searching those of his friend, his apprentice, his link to this clan. No. She had been his link to the clan, to return to it. He remained now because he had found a home in far more than just his old friend. He grinned impishly, “We both know better than that, don’t we? Trust in me, Impetus.”

“You are insane. I should have your head examined.” The Togruta muttered in annoyance, her anger subsided. “If they capture you...”

“They will torture me, before they kill me. I know.”

“Can you go back there?”

“I have to... to protect what you and Xen built. To protect our people.”

The rain fell, pitter-pattering raucously upon the pavement. It followed him in his thoughts through dark streets and alleys. Those memories falling away to the here and now to vanish into the shadows of the night that embraced the Dark Jedi. Every turn in his path brought him closer to their meeting place. A cold wind whipped about him upon breaching a final turn out of an alley and into a small plaza. The darkness receded to the press of small lamp posts set evenly about the square. All was silence but for the sound of the rain on cold and slick cobbles.

Mune was no fool, nor was he without the Force to tell him he had more than a couple snipers trained upon his position. He had entered the plaza exactly where they had instructed him to, right into the sights of men who could put a slug into him before he could begin to think to draw his saber. He knew well that had been the point. They may not have known him as well as others like Elinicia, Force users they had worked with for years. They did know enough to be prepared for him. A man stepped from the shadows, flanked by an armed guard.

“Grand Admiral. I did not think you would come alone.” The man’s eyes scanned the shadows set about the square in a bout of paranoia. Something in the man’s eyes reminded Mune briefly of the disbelief and anger he had seen in Elinicia’s eyes when the Hybrid had stated he would be going in solo. This man judged him as much as Elinicia had for the seemingly brash decision. “You realize what you’ve done coming here alone? We can capture you and turn you in right here and now if we chose...”

“Yes, you certainly could.” Mune lifted his hands slowly, jacket opening showing the lack of any weapon, including his lightsaber. The man looked taken completely aback though motioned one of his guards forward to pat down the hybrid. A look of confusion was exchanged between them before the guard retook his position. “Satisfied?”

“You came alone and unarmed.”

“I felt no necessity in carrying my weapon to this meeting, nor an armed guard.” Mune stated simply. “Nor do I intend to turn the Force on you and your men. That is not why I am here.”

The intent had never been to fight these men. If they chose to take him captive, the war was as good as lost anyway. Elinicia had known this as much as Mune had. If they could not regain at least in part, their military, there was nothing left for them. Their numbers were hurting. He held the man’s eye. He felt the hesitation in the snipers above him, the wavering resolve of the other hidden soldiers. They were used to the fighters of the clan, the violent and the forceful. Mune held the man’s eye, he needed them to see he was no threat to them. Not here, not now.

“My life is in your hands, Commander.”

“The only chip we could have hoped for more than you, would be the Doctor. Why would you...”

“I would, because I have to.” Mune spoke clearly, making sure the other men nearby could listen and understand his words. “Without you, your men, the rest of the military, the empire is shattered. It is only a matter of time.”

The men shifted, their commander swallowed slowly, taking in the words of the man before him. “We stand now with the New Dawn.”

“Do you, though? I wonder.” He offered a smile. His expression gentle, friendly. “The Empire is more than Xen. More than we Force users.” He sweeps all the visible men with his gaze. “It is its military, its civilians, this system.”

“You expect us to eat up your pretty words?” This from one of the guards.

“He is right... you come to us expecting us to just fall in line?” This from the commander now, the man narrowed his eyes at the Hybrid before him.

Mune sighed softly. He pulled back his hood, feeling the cold of the rain run down his face and soak his head, matting it to his scalp and forehead. He dropped his hands to his sides, he locked his gaze once more with the man in command. “I apologize... I wish I could say I could name every one of you here before me, Seth Vaughn, but I cannot.” Mune felt the impact speaking the man’s name made. He knew well enough the commander of this small brigade was generally not the most well-known. Likely this was his attempt at generating some clout for his name, bringing in a Palatinaean.

“Commander Vaughn. Without you, your men, other men like you, there is no Empire!” Mune raised his voice. “Without the might of the military, we stand alone and our Emperor will perish. All the men you faced within the halls for so many years will be destroyed! If that is what you desire, then, do me the mercy of killing me here and now. Save me the torture of those murderers!”

His voice rang passionately. The sound of the rain seemed to fall away from the square in that moment. The night held its breath. No one could speak, no one could begin to know what to say. Here stood a man most had understood to be recent to the clan, standing for it with passion and resolve. They knew the psychotics of the clan. No one could have guessed the even handed, softer spoken Hybrid would prove to be among them, and suicidal on top of it all.

“If they find us out, they would kill us all.” Seth spoke, visibly shaken by the words of the man before him. “I need to think of my men.”

“I know, my friend. You need to think of your men... but I, and Doctor Elincia must think of all our men.” He watched the impact of those words. The snipers were no longer trained on him. “All of them.”

The Commander motioned, his men began to slowly withdraw. Seth eyed the Dark Jedi for a moment before speaking uncertainly. “We never met here, Grand Admiral. My men will respect silence. Disappear.”

Mune did just that, engulfed once more by shadows he withdrew into the night. From alley to alley he moved, down dark streets on a different course than the one he had taken to arrive at the meeting place. A circuitous route that once more brought him to the dark tunnels under the city. He was in no hurry. He found a place to rest, safe within their place of hiding where other clansmen would ensure security. He fed himself, and within only six hours from the time of his meeting, he was before Elincia. The Togruta looked at her Master in an odd mix of disbelief and fond admiration.

“How?”

“I told them the truth.”

“Which was?”

“They are as much the Empire as us, as the rest of the clan, as Xen. Without them, all is undone.” Mune said plainly. He was not about to sugar coat it for his friend.

“I... see.”

“I kindled that fire that makes us all who we are in the larger scheme of things. I fanned that fire, that resolve to fight for a home built by one’s own hands. We are only conquered if they let us be.” The flames of his own resolve flickered in his brilliant ruby eyes. “How many?”

“A hand full of companies so far, but whatever flames you fanned, those flames are rapidly spreading. This will not stay quiet, I promise you that.”

“We do not want it to remain quiet. We want them shaken up by what we’ve just done.”

“Evening the odds?” Elinia asked.

“It is not about evening the odds. It is about restoring the body of the Empire, its spirit. We will not be dominated by the likes of the New Dawn.”

“Not the heart?”

“The heart, we will need to fight for. Xen is that heart, and this war does not end until we have him back.”

They sat in silence then. They both understood that this was but a minor victory in a war that still raged. Blood had not been spilled, but would soon be again upon their hands and their boots. For now, they need but rest and wait for the next opportunity. Mune thought, with some affection, of the man he had faced in the dimly lit plaza. He would have to thank Seth, and hope beyond hope the man survived to the end. He hoped they all survived to see the end of the war.