

The Expected “Gift”

“To my dearest brother, Timeros. It has come to my attention that you will not be present during Sithmas, and as you should know, this makes me sad. However, I am happy to know that you will not be alone. I have sent a few things with the courier of this note, each labeled with your names. Please see to it that Maenaki receives hers. I believe you will approve of it and its uses.

*Best Seasons wishes,
Atyiru Caesus Entar, Consul of Arcona”*

Timeros closed the colorfully pictured *Sithmas* card and tucked it inside the festive envelope it came in. The courier stood by, waiting to be addressed before handing over two brightly wrapped packages. On both of the gaudy boxes was a small note attached to each perfectly tied bow and the Arconae frowned slightly as he read them.

“To Maenaki. Do not open until Sithmas day. With love from Atty,” read the first and the second, “To Timmles. Do not open until Sithmas. I mean it! We worked hard on this and it is a benefit to the Clan if you wait. Love, your favorite and sister.”

The note attached to his gift made him softly sigh behind his stony countenance, but the courier did not appear to notice and continued to stand at attention.

“You may leave,” he said, not looking as he pushed the Consul’s presents to the side of his desk. The officer gave a curt bow and turned away as Timeros pressed the button on his comlink.

“Maenaki, you are required. My office.”

In the sparring room, on the far side of the ship, Maenaki was panting in frustration. The Arconae had been disgruntled by her lack of combat prowess and made no attempts to hide his disapproval each time she stumbled. He, unlike the Seltron, was fast, graceful, experienced and incredibly adept at catching her off-guard. Feats that she once prided herself on were made to look as though she were an infant, stumbling backward out of a chair. She could see where she was going wrong, but she simply could not correct it as quickly as the Elder corrected.

The Arconae never got angry or displayed any outburst of impatience, but something about his stance made him seem unfocused. As though he was only partially present. This frustrated Maenaki the most. Even at her best and his distraction, she still could

not keep up. Once he had left her to practice on her own she viciously attacked the training dummies until her knuckles were scraped and bruised. Sweat rolled down her temples and her hair splayed out in wet, disheveled strands. When his voice called from her comlink it broke her peaceful reverie, pulling a small growl from her as she punched the dummy once more.

Maenaki Dalevi'in had only been under the tutelage of Timeros for a few weeks and she knew well that he did not like to be kept waiting. However, she was in no rush to test her wit against his while she was in such a state of disarray and, unlike the girl before her, she also had no intention of trying to impress him. She wiped the sweat from her exposed skin, finding herself pleased with her scent, and tightened her braids back into their neat rows. The Seeker took a slow, calming breath and made her way to Timeros' main office.

Once Maenaki stood at the door, she knew she must steel herself for the encounter and she dove into the icy chambers of her mind. The Seltron inhaled the cool air deep into her lungs, preparing herself for battle as the door opened. The Seeker expertly scanned the room, quickly finding that she was alone. In between heartbeats, the Battlemaster was spinning and blocking an attack from behind. Her forearm stopped the open-palmed blow a few inches in front of her face, forcing her to step back before countering with a sharp kick to the Entar's inner thigh. Yet Timeros was no mundane civilian and his speed was far superior to the older, less experienced woman. He snapped his arm back, smoothly avoiding her foot and caught her ankle. Before Maenaki could react, the Entar stepped past her as she lay on her back.

"That was not even close to fair," she groaned, sitting up and sliding her hands through loose whips of crimson hair.

"The enemy will not care," Timeros stated flatly, moving behind his desk and sitting down. He inclined to the seat, gesturing for her to do the same.

"You should bear in mind that I have neither the skill nor the desire to be on the same battlefield as you, Timeros. You are the blunt weapon meant to bash down walls and slay all in Arcona's path. I am meant to show Arcona the weak points in the infrastructure so to make your life..." she paused, waiting for him to look at her before smiling and continuing her point. "Let's just say that I am here to make sure you live to my age."

Maenaki fully realized that he had spent the majority of his youth, and his late Human adult life, fighting for Arcona. He had been consumed in a life of battle and conflict for nearly as long as she had spent in espionage and sabotage. It was not her intention to invalidate him so much as to stress that she had been surviving for as

long as he had been alive, that his instruction and combat training was wasted on her. But, as was his usual reaction, Timeros merely gave her a glacial look that caused the hair on the back of her neck to stand up.

K'tana once told Maenaki that the Elder was prone to use his ability to instill utter dread as an off-handed reaction, but the Seltron had never been made subject to its full weight- and secretly never planned to be. She chose her words with care, choosing them with respect to the man to whom she spoke.

“What was it that required me, Timeros? I believe you would prefer me to be back in training unless you've suddenly found my company to be to your liking?” Her sea-green eyes lit up as she spoke, gently arching an eyebrow while keeping the rest of her features soft and straight.

“No. The Consul has delivered your forgotten weapon.” Timeros stated flatly, holding out a brightly wrapped box.

Without hesitation, Maenaki slid one hand over his as she lifted the box with the other. She made no notion that it was intentional, or that it even happened, but she felt the tremor in his fingers as she slipped her hand away. A wide, grateful smile grew on her lips as she started to open the box. She stopped, looking at the gift still on the table next to him.

“Am I supposed to wait?” she asked, quietly curbing her enthusiasm.

“It should not matter.” he shrugged, glancing at his sister’s present but making no move towards it. He watched quietly as Maenaki opened her gift and abruptly her face changed from excitement to shock.

“Well, this is not what either of us expected. I'm sorry to have wasted your time,” the Seeker said, turning to leave. Before she had taken a single step toward the door, Timeros was suddenly standing in front of her and scowling down into the box in her hands.

Whether he believed she had received something dangerous or worthless was not of importance, but she had still managed to spark his instinct to react. It was not until the full force of his true presence washed over her that she realized her mistake. What she had hoped would be an amusing prank became her quivering in the corner of his office, head buried between her hands as she wept like a violently beaten child. As Timeros pulled the electro whip and slinky dress from the box, Maenaki sat trembling and sobbing on the floor. As he withdrew from the room, leaving the contents on the floor, the Seltron finally stopped wondering why K'tana had left.

Her watery eyes locked on the trash bin at the side of his desk and Maenaki struggled to read the front of a brightly colored card sitting on the front.

“Happy Sithmas!”