

Port Ol'val  
Phantom Complex  
Briefing Chamber

Kordath Bleu yawned and stumbled his way through the security doors, a tray of steaming mugs in hand as he made his way into the meeting. Holo images flashed on the projector, one after another, scenes of destruction and violence. The glare he caught from his fiancée softened somewhat as he placed the caf on the table, sliding one her way. He doubted anyone was surprised he'd shown up late, but at least he had brought an offering in apology. With a nod towards the images as he settled in, he interrupted the various conversations the different Gatekeepers were holding.

"What's this then, new action-holo? Or more of the Grandmaster's little vendetta with anythin' that do nae look like him?"

This comment drew some looks of annoyance and a hiss of exasperation from the Kaleesh, Rogon. "The Lotus struck back, Kordath. These are the results of a raid to destroy a shipyard belonging to Pravus."

"Lotus? Tell me that's not what tha resistance is callin' itself now," he spoke with a sigh. "Right, okay, so tha Lotus, bleedin' silly name, blew up some of his toys. Grand. Nothin' like pokin' tha Gundark ta see if it'll crush ya."

"Yes, Lotus. The resistance struck a severe blow, Kord, so we're expecting retaliation." This reply came from the Gate Warden Zujenia, who held her mug of caf with her fingertips as it cooled. "That's why I called this meeting because we need to be ready."

"Why, we have somethin' ta do with it?"

Dead silence was the response to his rather flippant remark, causing the Ryn to groan and rub a hand over his tired eyes. A glance showed Skar trying not to look proud; his shoulders squared as he kept his eyes up towards the images projected.

"Oh kark me."

"Can they trace it back to us?" This had come from the raven haired woman to his right, Livana. He'd not spent much time in conversation with her, the woman's stare was unsettling.

"Frankly, they don't have to. Our Consul is under suspicion of working with the resistance, or so-called Lotus now, already. We should anticipate trouble, and Port Ol'val is the gateway to the rest of the Dajorra system."

Kordath nearly forgot his fatigue, and his caf, as he watched the man sitting near the head of the table speak. That was the most he'd ever heard out of the Entar who ran the Clan's intelligence network. It was enough to make the Ryn feel a sense of dread to hear Timeros speak at length, much less the subject matter.

"So we're proper karked," he mumbled to himself, wincing as he caught a withering glare from the Warden.

"If you had shown up on time, Kordath, you'd know all this already as we've discussed it at length."

"Aye, luv, but if I'd been on time I'd not have been able ta get tha caf together! That and ye called tha meetin' at such an hour; a man oughtta be in bed." He gave the half-Ryn a winning smile which earned him a roll of the eyes. That they'd had to stagger their arrival times to maintain the facade of non-involvement in front of the team was something he delighted in verbally poking her over.

"Well, fortunately, you did not miss the assignments part of the meeting." Her voice sounded almost sweet as she spoke, enjoying the grimace on her future husband's face. "Those of you with more public cover identities treat things as business as usual. Keep an eye out for suspicious activity and people of interest. The rest of you do what you do, prowl from the shadows and watch for troublemakers or anything out of the ordinary."

"Some of you are still getting settled, you newer arrivals," she stated, glancing at the 'low' end of the table. Kelviin the Wookiee grunted something and seemed to have appropriated two spaces for himself as he took in the briefing. Alongside him, the Twi'lek, Tali, and the Human medic Koliss sat and watched as well. Maxine, a Zeltron, and Lilutha, another Twi'lek, sat together at the corner very nearly huddled as if scared of the rest.

"Well, I'll be pairing you off as we go along. Koliss, I want you to stay near the Phantom Complex, we don't have an extensive medical staff on the station that we can trust. We'll be keeping you close in case anything happens, and while Kordath is your sponsor he already has a medic in his little retinue. Maxine will be with Livana as her Master is on Selen at the moment."

This brought a round of sideway glances amongst the more experienced Keepers, ranging from wincing to grins. The Proconsul's recent punishment had been the unofficial topic of many an encounter amongst the team members, though they'd been told not to make a fuss over it.

"Calm down, children. Kelviin will be working with Adem on tracking down suspicious people, as he has a technical knowledge. I know, I know! You don't speak Shyriiwook, Adem, but I trust you two to make it work. Lilutha, you're with your Master, please assist him in any way you can."

Kordath smirked into his caf as he caught the smokey look the blue skinned Twi'lek shot her pale Master down the table. Edraven had his eyes closed, but the Ryn could just sense the annoyance, directed more at Bleu for pairing them up than at the former slavegirl. At least they thought she wasn't one anymore; it was hard to tell if she believed that from the way she acted.

Zujenia sighed and rubbed at her temples. "Tali, dear, you'll be with me. I know you're more familiar with Bleu, but I thought you and I should get some time in together."

The lavender Twi'lek waved a lekku in acknowledgment at the half-Ryn. Kord tried once more to hide his amusement at the way his lover was treating the former pleasure slave he'd brought on to Ol'val to help train. That she found reasons to separate the two on a regular basis hadn't been overlooked by the Rollmaster, and he wasn't sure how wise it would be to needle her over it in private. It had the potential to cause great fun.

"Let's see, who's left? Ah, Marrek you only recently returned to us, glad to have you back, you'll be backing up Adem. I understand you two have worked together in the past. As for Xia," she paused, the hybrid biting her lower lip as she glanced at the graceful Sephi sitting nearby. "I believe she will be fulfilling an advisory role, the same for Strategos."

*Code for 'doin' whatever she karkin' wants because they ain't gonna listen anyways.*

"Everyone be careful, please? If anything comes up that seems like real trouble, do not hesitate to call it in. Timeros is going to be operating out of the Complex to help coordinate and assess the possible threats, as well as dispatching back up." Zujenia stood at the end of the table, staring over her over populated team with concern. Bleu felt a twinge of worry, and he knew how much it would pain her if any of them came to real harm. "Be vigilant, but try not to be overly paranoid. There's a chance nothing will even happen out here."

A glance towards the blonde haired Adept sitting next to her told Kord all he needed to know about that last statement. As people stood and began to part ways, he felt the blue, unblinking eyes upon him. The Ryn sat in his chair as the rest left, leaving the DIA director and the team leader alone with the Rollmaster.

"This is gonna be bad, eh?"

"It might be, Bleu," she spoke with a tired sigh. "Stay on your toes, okay? I know you've got a good sense for trouble but don't get into any you can avoid."

"We all gots a job, luv." Kordath shrugged and leaned back while attempting to meet Timeros's stare. "Somethin' I need ta know, mate? Or is this a trust issue?"

*I must be bleedin' tired ta have even asked that. Well, no takin' it back, let's hope he does nae kill me.*

The question wasn't without reason. Not but a few months earlier Kordath had been an enemy of the state, albeit an unwilling one. And the Arconae before him was well known for eliminating threats against the Clan. Before even that, though the Ryn had been Captain of the Nighthawk, a ship that was more or less attached to the DIA. His surrender and conversion to the side of an enemy force hadn't reflected well on his status with that particular organization.

Not that he and Timeros had ever talked it over. Kord had moved out to Ol'val to get away from a lot of the mistrust he'd garnered on Selen and amongst the Galeres forces. Ending up in a team with the director hadn't been part of his plan, but somehow despite the expected distrust from the DIA, he'd found himself getting the occasional task kicked his way. Nothing official, ever, just a 'suggestion to go and check out this location' and the sort. With no back up from the Agency of course.

"I don't need to trust you, Kordath, not as long as you're doing your job. Keep an eye on the Docks for the next day or so, look for anything suspicious."

"That a suggestion or an order?"

"Consider it both," stated Zujenia, her tone clipped in a manner that said the conversation was not to be entertained.

"Fair enough," he sighed and stood, pushing his chair back in and giving the pair a mock bow. "I'll be on me way then."

"Hold for a moment," spoke up the hybrid, standing as well. She walked with him out the room and let the door slide shut. "Do you have to make an arse out of yourself whenever we have a meeting?"

"Love you too, Zuj." He grinned at her.

"Would you keep it down!" The hissed statement came with a short punch to his shoulder. "You know why we can't let people know too much about us, Kord. I know it's silly that I make you come to the meeting after me, but it's for security reasons."

He gave her another grin alongside a cocked eyebrow before stepping in towards her. She backed up until she felt the wall behind her. "Luv, if tha Human-droid in there doesnae know about us already, I'll eat me tail. That one knows almost as much as Blinky, and her bleedin' throne does."

With gentle movements he placed both hands on her rounded hips, staring up into her amber eyes. "Hidin' it is a wee bit o' fun, I'll admit, but if ya can nae trust tha team, who can we trust?"

"Kord," she growled, pushing at his chest to get him away. He gave ground gracefully, bowing to her and wagging his tail over his shoulder at her. This came with a wink as he caught the tug of a smile on her lips before she hit him again. "Go! The sooner we can be certain the station is safe the faster we can, um."

"Um?" Now he was smiling wide. "I'll let me imagination run wild with words like that, luv. Right! Off ta work!"

His tail waved at her once more as he walked away, certain she was watching him. He didn't have to glance over his shoulder to see her rolling her eyes again.

-X-

It was with a sigh that the Ryn collapsed into the chair behind his desk. The office of Bleu's Clues Investigative Services had gotten more civilized looking in recent weeks. He'd even invested in a pair of desks, one large the other small, for his Fades so that they felt more included in things. Stres'trong'armis had appreciated it, though finding a chair that would sustain his bulk was an on-going side mission for the trio. His most current attempt was sitting by the door waiting for the disposal droids, broken down into parts after only a short while of the massive Chiss settling into it.

Sprout had yet to use his chair, much to the Ryn's annoyance. It hadn't been easy finding a high stool that was both the right height and wide enough to give the Falleen midget a good fit. Kord's seat was comfortable enough that he'd been woken up in it several times when working too late. He'd received it as payment from some merchant who'd lost much of his wares to a group of thieves while docked in port, and while Bleu had been chastised about not getting credits for his work he'd never regretted it. Even now his eyes were drifting close as he waited for his people to arrive, the early morning Shadow Gate meeting having forced him out of bed early. Usually, he didn't mind an early wake up when Zuj was staying over. It meant he either got to watch her sleep or find her awake, either way, it meant peace, quiet, and cuddles.

He sat up abruptly as the door slammed shut behind Sprout, bearing a brown sack and a few to-go caf's from the shop down the way.

"Tell me you brought food," he said, suddenly noticing how ravenous he was feeling.

"Yeah, yeah, few sandwiches in there and some sweeter stuff for Strong. You should talk to him, boss, about laying off that stuff, he's gonna get fat."

"You tell him," grumbled Kordath even as he shoved a third of a Nerf and egg biscuit into his mouth, chewing loudly. "You and me together donae make one of 'im, Sprout. He can have whatever he bleedin' feels like."

Kordath looked around the not so spacious office in confusion. "Where is tha big fella anyhow?"

The Falleen shrugged in response, settling atop his desk to eat his breakfast. "Dunno said he was going out last night, and I haven't seen him since. He should have gotten the same message I did, right?"

"Aye. Now where could Strong be goin' out ta, hrm."

As if summoned the bruiser of a Fade opened the office door, looking as haggard and worn as Bleu usually did. He didn't speak, hanging his rumpled coat on a hook and walking into the small kitchen to wash his face. Sprout and Kord exchanged a look of confusion as the big man walked out and to his desk, opening one of the drawers to pull a folded button down out. As he shrugged out of his current one, covered in odd stains and uncharacteristically filthy, he finally turned his red eyes on the pair.

**"Ah! Friends! Yes, I apologize for being late. The night ran longer than I had anticipated."**

"Strong, mate," started the Ryn, cocking his head to the side.

**"Do not worry, Master Bleu, I am well. A bit tired but nothing a good shot or two of caf can't fix, ha ha! Ah, thank you young Sprout, this shall make my morning much easier!"**

"Strong, where ya been, mate? Not like ya ta be last in, nor covered in," the Arconan paused and sniffed the air. "Whatever it is yer covered in."

"He said he was going out last night," spoke up Sprout, a grin across the little green man's face. The way Strong tensed up told Kord loads.

"Ya big blue dog! Who's tha lucky one?"

The Chiss looked uncomfortable for a few long moments. **"I do not know if one could refer to it in the manner you both are insinuating. It was simply a night out with a curious woman that took an unexpected turn."**

"Quietest I've ever bleedin' heard ya talk, mate. So what happened? Not tha expected could mean all sorts a things when it comes ta you, never seen ya pursue a lady before!"

**"I only offered to buy her dinner and expected to indulge in conversation, Master Bleu! I had no untoward intentions towards the young lady nor did I intend for our activities for the evening to progress past perhaps walking her home! A noble son of House Garmis does not take advantage of a maiden on the first date! Such honorable methods have been passed down my family line for generations!"**

"Maiden," choked out Sprout as he spat caf and fell back, nearly tumbling off of his desk.

"That's what ya get fer not usin' a bleedin' chair! Now why was that so funny?"

It was with a glower towards the hysterical Falleen that Strong replied. **"Young Sprout does not believe the company I was keeping was of the honorable sort. I will admit that she is not conventional, but I seem to think much higher of her than he does."**

Kordath sat in silence for a few moments, waiting for their midget medic to calm down, sipping his caf. While he tried not to think about what kind of woman the big Fade would be interested in, the mind was already racing with the images of larger than life women that caused him to shudder.

**"Miss Diy seems perfectly pleasant when you get to know her, I assure you."**

This time it was Kord who spat caf, going wide-eyed as he looked at his bodyguard.

"DIY!?"

**"Yes, Sir."**

"DIY!? Tha Kiffar lass? Tha one runnin' with tha Crimson Hounds or Wolves or whatever they is, tha one Zujenia is mates with in her cover identity?"

**"Yes, Sir. She showed an interest and persistence, only relenting on disrupting my day to day life when I said I would take her out for dinner. Her company is quite pleasant, and while her manner is crass, it is no worse than many of the mercenaries I've served with in the past. Also, she is very lovely when she puts in an effort, though she has a certain allure without trying, as well."**

"She's a bleedin' Kiffar, Strong! Ya know what kind o' trouble that can be, yeah? The whole psychmetricthingy they can do!"

**"Are you not capable of that as well, Sir?"**

"NOT THA BLEEDIN' POINT, STRONG! She gets her hands on ya, and I recall tha first time we met her she planted 'em firmly on yer arse, and she can learn all sorts a things we do nae need gettin' out!"

The Fade was rubbing his temples. **"Master Bleu, the young lady and I shared an adventurous night--no, not like that -- that leads me to believe that I can trust her with minor details. She is well aware that you are an investigator and that you and 'Jeane' as your paramour calls herself while undercover, are something of an item. We also spoke**

**about respecting one another's privacy should we move forward, something she was very forward about."**

Kord noted a reddening in the big man's cheeks. "Was she now?"

**"I believe, as a Kiffar, it is something that has come up for her in the past for even friendships. You know what it is like to feel distrusted simply because of your race, Master Bleu. Do you think it any different for a young lady who comes from a species that can read your past with a touch?"**

The Ryn looked down at his half-eaten sandwich rather than meet his friend's eye. "Aye, suppose so. But you're responsible for this end of security, Strong. Just be careful. And try ta have fun," stated Bleu with a sudden grin.

"Now," spoke the Arcanist, straightening up behind his desk and looking at his two Fades in turn. "Tha business of tha day. We've been asked ta keep an eye out down by tha docks. Watch for anybody comin' in that looks like trouble. Or feels like it."

"Why?" asked the medic, having caught his breath finally.

Kord grimaced and then sighed. "Turns out tha resistance folks hit Pravus, and they did it hard. Blew up some shipyard or somethin'. Not important, what they did, just that we think it's gonna blow back on Arcona. And Ol'val..."

**"Is the first step into the Dajorra system. We believe the station is in danger?"**

The Ryn shrugged. "Dunno nothin' for certain, lads. Just been told ta keep an eye out in case somethin' does come our way. We're tha first set of eyes; everybody else is on alert as well, so we ain't alone. This is gonna get real close ta operatin' in tha open, so we gotta be careful."

"The new guy coming along? Kol?"

"Koliss? Nah, they're keepin' him near command in case things get karked. Which with our luck, they probably will, eh? Might have ta send ya that way as well, Sprout, if things get properly messed up."

"Yaaay," muttered the medic.

"Ah, don't be so melodramatic. Least you'll be out of tha bad stuff if it happens. Right! We make for tha Docks, we keep an eye out, we donae get shot. That's what today is gonna be about," stated the Ryn, firmly, as he stood up.



Kordath leaned against a cargo container, head thumping against it in frustration. Half a day of hanging around the Docks, moving from berth to slip, watching newcomers to the shadowport disembark. Some people they were able to dismiss out of hand, known merchants that Shadow Gate had done extensive background checks on before, charter pilots and pirates that did regular business on Ol'val. Then there were the new arrivals that had to be followed around for a while or given a light scan for intentions, best as the Ryn could manage.

A few got detailed off to Adem and his team over the comms; some were disregarded after describing them to Timeros. Bleu tried to ignore whatever that might mean, delving too far into the DIA director's business could be unhealthy. So for hours upon hours the trio wandered the Docks, poking about the cargo containers and manifests, watching passengers and pilots. And they were bored out of their skulls, to the point that Kordath was debating causing some mischief of his own just to break up the monotony.

When a trio of casually dressed Humans in dark clothing came off a passenger shuttle, the Ryn decided to abate some boredom by following them around. Leaving Strong behind to continue the rounds with Sprout he began to trail the two males and a single woman. They didn't stop as they entered the Ducts, not at any shop or one of the many cafes or bars that had been carved out of the twisted paths. That in itself wasn't too odd; some people knew what business they were about, but nobody had greeted these three on arrival.

As they neared the Plaza portion of the station the woman, red haired and pale glanced over her shoulder. The Ryn, as naturally as could be, walked right past the three without a word as she looked over at him. When he reached a storefront right inside of the central level of the plaza, he turned to face it. He checked for the group out of the corner of his eye they weren't in sight. A sense of dread rose as he spun, head whipping back and forth.

*Oh bugger, where'd they go? How'd I lose 'em? That shouldnae be possible!*

Bleu jumped as his comm piece buzzed in his ear, prompting him to key it on.

"Kordath, where did you go?" came the voice of the DIA director, cold and direct.

"Thoguht I had somebody ta tail--did Strong call somethin' in?"

"He did not. You left your post, Kordath. You should have called the suspects in."

He rolled his eyes, tail lashing in annoyance as he started to walk back through the Ducts.

"Mate, was bored as 'ell, alright? Me lads are keepin' an eye out down there; they know tha drill, just figured I'd tail a few meself."

"A few? Your initial statement suggested a single target, give me the information as you should have before following them like a lost child." The tone was still frigid, yet somehow scathing.

"Uh, three of 'em, two males, one female, all Human. Didnae get a good look at tha blokes, the lady was red haired and fair, mighta been good lookin', but I didnae get a good look at her. What's tha big deal, why are ya steppin' on me tail here, mate?"

There was a much longer pause than the Ryn had expected from the Entar on the other end of the line. "Did you believe you and your Fades to be the only people on station in the Docks? While you were going against protocol and tracking suspicious people instead of calling them in, one of my teams went dark. Station security just found their bodies in a lesser traveled exit from the Docks. They believe an electrical system shorted out in that corridor."

"Oh kark," muttered the Rollmaster, to himself. "So somebody is on the station that's out ta cause trouble. Anythin' there for me ta check up? I can track if they left anythin' behind--"

"Get back to the Docks, Kordath. My people are looking into it. If something turns up that requires you, I will contact you." The comm went silent, much to the relief of the Ryn, who sighed and scrubbed at his face. "I'm completely karked."

By the time he'd made it back to the Docks proper, it was getting on late in the daytime shift for Ol'val. Workers were clocking out, droids returning to maintenance areas, and his Fades seemed fixated on an oft-overlooked cargo hatch off to one end. It wasn't used on a regular basis, only for larger shipments that weren't able to be broken up, or by station administration for repair parts and the like. It lead to the inner workings of the shadowport, though there were a lot of run-offs to and from the corridor it lead too.

His fellows had found a bit of decking that overlooked that end of the Docks, Strong leaning against the railing. When the Ryn closed in, catching Sprout's eye who looked grim, he saw why they were watching. Station personnel was doing clean up, a line of unmoving bodies laid out on the deck. He felt a fit of nausea coming along as he took in the sight; more than one of the dead agents were people he was familiar with. One or two of them may have even still owed him from the last Sabaacc night the lot of them had thrown.

"Bollocks, Timmy mentioned over tha comms what had happened, but still. Did ya lads see what went through that gate, by chance?"

"Big cargo containers, two of them." Sprout spoke quietly, shaking his head. "They sealed the blast door when they went through, so we didn't get a good look at them. Something was odd about them, so we tried to follow, but we couldn't get through the lock in time. Not without you, boss."

**"I will string them up by their heels and batter them against the walls for this,"** growled the Chiss, getting a look from both of his fellows. **"We could hear them, Master Bleu, the bulkhead may have muffled their screams, but we were close enough to catch it. They**

**screamed as they died, but never did they beg for mercy. Such a death should be avenged."**

Kordath swallowed, watching as sheets were pulled over the still forms below. "This was my fault, boys. I shoulda stuck ta tha mission," he whispered.

A big blue hand fell upon his shoulder, **"NO! Blame will be placed upon the heads of those who committed this act, Sir, not upon those who sought to defend the station! Mister Bol'era and his team are already investigating the tunnels going in and out of the access corridor, may they find something of use."**

"May they indeed," snarled the Ryn, pounding a hand on the railing. "I lost tha ones I was tailin' as well; if they was workin' with tha people in tha tunnel than they're bloody good at this. Sprout, mate, get back ta tha Complex."

"What? Why? I should be with Strong. And you, of course, boss."

Kord turned and squatted in front of his compatriot, something that he was aware the midget didn't appreciate. He was in no mood to entertain the medic. "Why? Because this is gonna get worse before it gets better, Sprout. Because Zuj and Koliss are gonna need yer help patchin' up whoever needs patchin' up. Now go."

He straightened up and watched the Falleen's face for a few moments, the little green man's dark eyes moving inexorably back towards the corpses. Finally, the medic nodded, his fists balled up.

"We'll call ya if we need support, Sprout, promise ya."

**"Be well, my small friend, and do not fret. There is a great honor to be found in tending to those who fall in battle! Remind me to tell you of my great uncle, Radiles, sometime! A combat medic of great renown back home!"**

"You've told me about him, Strong," muttered the Falleen, pushing past the pair, head down.

**"Young Sprout feels responsible,"** spoke Strong, his voice a low rumble to spare their comrade. **"We could not get through the door in time; all had already passed on by the time we got through."**

"My fault, that, Strong, if I'd been where I was meant ta be--"

**"Then we may have shared the fate of the intelligence team. We have no way to know, Master, and we should not waste time on possibilities as you say."**

As the Ryn stood in silence, debating their next move, his comm crackled to life. A high pitch whine shrieked from the device as if the short range communicator was dealing with interference.

*"East....Ducts...heavy fire...side....fire...somebody....karking....east side....heavy...assist!"*

"Sounds like Silver," muttered the Rollmaster, glancing at his bodyguard. "Come on; I'll call this in ta Zuj on our way."

**"You intend to inform Master Timeros as well?"**

"I'm sure she'll bloody tell him; donae think he wishes ta talk ta me at the moment."

-X-

Strong and Kord heard the fighting well before they reached it. Blaster fire, the report of slugthrowers and the sound of metal on metal clashing were all strong signs they were closing in on the right place. As it was, when Bleu reached a turn in the halls of the Ducts, he jerked himself back almost before he felt the warning from the Force. A slug buried itself in the rock at about head level, causing him to let out a shuddering sigh of relief.

A glance around the corner showed him a rather entertaining melee in action. Picking out Celevon was easy enough, he was fighting off no less than three thugs at a time with just his weirdly curved knife as they came at him with pipes. His fiery haired Fade, Jade, was moving through the crowd with purpose, slugthrowers spitting out metal with accuracy and prejudice. And then there was the most recent addition to the poor Edraven's retinue, the blue Twi'lek who was twisting through the crowd with the grace her species was blessed with, slashing at those who got too near.

"They donae look like agents of any kind ta me, Strong," he said, leaning back. "Still, they seem intent on doin' ill ta our mates, and we won't have that. Not again."

He unslung the staff from across his back, the tips humming to life. His lessons with Zujenia hadn't moved much past the basics, but in a setting like this, he couldn't see it mattering. That and he was angry after what had happened to the DIA team. These idiots were just in the way at the wrong time.

"Let's get crackin', mate," he growled with a vicious grin. The pair came around the corner in a rush, Kordath's staff lashing out at anyone he didn't recognize. The electrified ends sparked and spat as they slammed into those he hit, eliciting screams of surprise and pain. His Fade passed him quickly; the brawling Chiss was in his element. Kordath tried to ignore the fact that in the short steps between the hall and the fight his bodyguard had managed to shed his coat and shirt, fighting with his muscles on display. Though he had to admit the effect it had on their

opponents was impressive, it was hard to ignore three hundred pounds of muscle with burning red eyes rushing at you with fists the size of your head.

Dodging the few, possibly stray, shots from Jade as things winded down; Kordath caught his breath. He didn't figure the red head held anything against him still, after all, how was he to know she wasn't into the lads when he'd first met her? Water under the bridge, far as he was concerned, even if she'd nearly left a scar on his poor tail. Leaning on his staff, he gave the trio a little wave.

"Oi! Caught yer signal. What tha hell happened, ya tick off some of tha local toughs?"

"No idea," came the terse reply. "One moment we're asking some merchants about new faces coming through, the next a group of these idiots came down on us."

"A group? Ya mean this group or another?"

"Another."

"Ah, Hey, Lilu, ya doin' alright lass?"

"Uh-huh," spoke the former slave, who had approached Kord and Strong. Brown eyes were fixated on the Chiss, a hand lightly brushing across his midsection as she swayed around him in a circle.

"O...kay. Well," the Ryn paused, turning a body over with his weapon and peering at the man's clothing. "I donae see any gang markings, mate; this is a weird one. Know I've seen some of these around, though."

"This one has a pouch full of credits." Celevon held up said article as he rose from another thug. "My guess is somebody paid gangers to cause trouble, and if they came after us..."

"...they know what some of us look like, figures. They won't hit tha younger ones; probably donae know 'em. But you and me are bleedin' targets, bet. Pretty sure yer signal was bein' jammed down here as well, mate, that ain't a good sign."

"Why pay the locals to cause havoc? Easier to just come in with the Iron Legion and take the whole thing over."

"They hit tha opposite end of tha Docks, took out one of Tim's group o' spooks."

"Trying to split our focus, then. That still doesn't explain the tactics; Pravus has the manpower for more."

"Maybe they donae want tha station? Rather keep us busy while they go on ta Selen? Oi! Lilu! Cut it out, eh? The lad has got a ladyfriend already."

"Oooh but he looks like he can handle more than one," the two Arconan's heard her murmur in a throaty voice.

"Right. Okay. We should call this in."

**"Ladyfriend is a bit presumptuous, Master Bleu, the young miss and I have only been on a single date. It is hardly a relationship!"**

"Oh, aye, one night out on Ol'val with Diy is more than many could handle from tha state you was in this morning." The Ryn stepped up to his guard as Lilutha pouted and stepped away. He spoke more quietly, "'Sides, ya want me ta help gettin' that one off ya or not, eh?"

The Chiss looked down at him as if uncomprehending for a moment before realization hit. **"Ah! Yes! I fear, young Miss Lilu, my heart has been claimed by another!"**

"Mmm, shame," said the Twi'lek, strutting over to where Celevon was talking into his communicator and draping her arms over his shoulders, which he shrugged off without missing a beat.

"Now even tha local crazies are turnin' on us, this won't be pretty, Strong."

**"We shall meet them blow for blow, Sir. Have no doubt."**

"Aye--"

"Kord! We're being recalled."

"Both of us?"

"Most of us," corrected Celevon, tucking his comlink away. "Some of the others are going to keep looking around, but the rest of us are being recalled. Zuj said something about downtime and planning."

"Break wouldn't be amiss, aye," spoke Kordath as he felt the tiredness setting in as adrenaline left him. "Could do with a wee nap."

-X-

The Phantom Complex was more lively than Kordath had ever seen it before. Usually, those who worked in the base were far and away from the sight of the field operatives that made up

Shadow Gate, but even they were buzzing about the place. Bleu yawned and slouched further into the briefing chair as data analysts and aides ran in and out of the room, collecting the quick write ups the members of the team were putting together. His own had been rather short; now he just wished he could get some peace and quiet. He could, ideally, have headed to one of the other parts of the Complex, some of the Keepers were in the bunk area catching naps already.

He yawned again and looked down the table at where the bureaucrats and intelligence folks kept circling. The blonde haired Human had arranged datapads and notes, eyes roving across data as it came to him. More to his interest was the white-haired woman standing next to him, poring over a map of the station. Amber eyes flashed from critical point to necessary system and back again, her jaw set grimly. Even with how tired he felt, and how badly he felt he'd karked the whole day up. Bleu just felt like he should stick close by in case she needed him.

Not that she would, but he felt better knowing he was there if it came up. Off to one side, chatting about things that he had no frame of reference for were Koliss and Sprout, something to do with stitching or removing something or the other. Bleu shook his head again to try and shake off the coming darkness but felt his eyes closing regardless of his efforts.

--I Just a quick nap. Gotta be fresh, case somethin' happens.

Of course, he awoke when the yelling down the hall started, forcing him from his nice, comfy seat to standing on the table wild, eyed with a dagger in hand. A raised eyebrow from Timeros and a look of embarrassed shock from Zujenia got him to climb back down, catching the sight of Sprout and Koliss running out of the room.

"Wounded?"

"Good nap, Mister Bleu?" asked the Entar.

"Who got hurt?"

"That is not your concern at the moment," state the man, leaning forward to place his hand on a datapad, turning it about and sliding it down the table. "This is."

"Ya know yer not me boss, right, Tim?"

"Read the blasted intel, Kord," sighed Zujenia, rubbing at tired eyes as she sat down.

He felt a muscle around one of his eyes twitch but picked up the datapad nonetheless. Glancing over the information he blinked several times, before looking back up at the pair in surprise.

"Bombs? They was movin' bombs ta the inner section of tha station ta blow up tha life support and shields?"

"It would appear so."

"And you bleedin' let me sleep through it!?"

"You looked tired," mentioned Zuj, yawning herself. "For that matter, I'm going to get some rest myself. You should go help with clean up and make sure that they didn't miss any other agents."

Kordath gaped at his fiance and the director. They'd let him sleep through the end of the operation or at least the exciting bits.

"Karkin' kiddin' me," he sighed out to himself, leaning back in his chair.