

JORM NA'TREJ

EXCIDIUM



**ON THE MIRROR'S EDGE**

**A CSP SHORT STORY**

Xantros leaned on the steel and glass edge of the balcony and took in the scenery. From the penthouse of this skyscraper in the southwest of Caelestis, he had an unobstructed view over the city, crown jewel of the Meraxis empire. The sun set somewhere behind him while Seraph had crawled halfway up into the sky, looming over its moon like a fat green-blue goddess.

Besides him, Rosh Nyine had knelt and opened a suitcase. Xantros mustered his colleague as the Human passed him a set of binoculars.

*Why do all these Empires go for black or grey uniforms? Would a little color really hurt?*

He shook off the thought. No matter what he preferred, wearing the dark garbs had made it so much easier for Rosh and him to twist the gullible minds of the Meraxian soldiers, they had free reign of the city.

He raised the glass to his eyes and looked straight east, to where the twin to the building he occupied stood in Caelestis' southeast. The mirrored skyscraper glittered like liquid fire in the sun's last warm rays, the tallest torch on Ragnath save for its brother and its father in the city center - the Emperor Adoniram Tower, seat of power for Caelestis City and all of Meraxis' holdings on Ragnath, orange sunset wildfire rising from the lush green of the park that isolated it from the rest of the city. No other building rose past half the twins' height.

A sound wormed its way into the Duro's consciousness. *Footsteps on ferrocrete. Behind and above!* He turned, hand sliding towards his weapon, when a singular figure dropped from the flat roof down onto the balcony. Rosh waved lazily at the newcomer.

"Startled you, Xanny?"

Bronze skin, yellow eyes, dark cornrows and a perpetual grin marked the speaker as one of Xantros' oldest frenemies.

"Just can't hold myself back from beating you silly, but then I remember you're already there," he retorted. Jorm laughed it off, and even the stoic Rosh snickered.

"How did you get in dressed like this, anyway," Xantros pressed on, eying the Kiffar from head to toe. A black tank top exposing his arm tattoo and white trousers made from some synthetic material were completed by shoes and fingerless gloves colored a bright red - all colors used by Meraxis, but off in shade and style.

"Like I came here, Xanny. Folks in this city don't look up."

Jorm's answer made Rosh's eyes go wide.

"You... but... in this mirror cabinet? I thought that's impoddible!"

The Kiffar shook his head and clicked his tongue at the Human.

"Faith. Have some."

Then he stepped up to the handrail and gazed upon the city.

"So guys... your thoughts?"

Xantros looked at the still puzzled Rosh before he answered.

“There’s a lot off about this city. There’s guards alright, but few people. It’s also too clean. There should be more trash on the streets.”

“It’s too quiet,” Rosh chimed in, “as if there were no vehicles here. Only the occasional bus or transport, sometimes a patrol car.”

Jorm nodded.

“Same here. Broke into a few buildings. Lots of rooms are still unfurnished. Those which are look more like a promo poster than something lived in.”

He raised his hand and wiggled his fingers.

“They all get swept every two weeks. Mostly droids. Same with the windows.”

Xantros laid his head to the side. “By all accounts, this city appears to be a showcase. Rumors among the guards we... used... say that it’s intended to be more, but right now, resources and personnel are needed on Seraph, so the expansion here stopped.”

Rosh nodded. “The city is a symbol. But a hollow one. At least until somebody does something about it one way or another.”

He shrugged uncomfortably.

“It’s soulless.”

Jorm pushed off the handrail and stretched.

“Okay then, I’ll make my way back to the pickup point with what we know. What about you two?”

Rosh glanced at Xantros.

“Those guards earlier mentioned that Caelestis serves as a holiday resort for ‘Heroes of Meraxis.’ I’m all for finding those guys and tricking them into telling us more about everything. Are you with me?”

Xantros considered for a moment, then nodded. “Just a moment.”

He produced his compblock, a gesture reciprocated by both of his companions. Seconds later, Jorm’s device had absorbed all their collected notes and records, and disappeared in some pocket again.

“Got it. See you around!”

Jorm launched himself up the wall and onto the rooftop. He looked back over his shoulder, one last gaze at the fiery festival of the dying sunset mirrored millionfold in the windows. Then he was gone.