

## *The Selenian Adjutant*

It was midday but the sky was dark and bleak, made more so by the torrential downpour falling on Fort Blindshot. After so long without rain, the ground would soak up more than enough to prevent any flooding, to say nothing for all the infrastructure that would siphon away any excess. Not quick enough to prevent any build up though. Boots splashed through ankle-deep water in the streets as Dajorra Defence Force soldiers went from building to building, while lamps flickered on as they registered the lack of light.

“Frackin’ hell,” the sergeant on staff duty said when one particular soldier traipsed inside, her uniform and hair clinging to her in a sopping mess. “You really going to drag that mess across my floor?”

The Selenian grimaced, offering a rude finger gesture while she proceeded to cross the foyer, leaving a large puddle with each squishing step. She could feel the sergeant’s glare on the back of her head, and that only made her walk all the more satisfying, even as the cool climate-controlled air started to work through her wet clothes and into her skin. A quick shiver bolted through her spine as she stepped into the lift, pressing the third floor button with one hand while the other pulled the mess of hair from her face and rearranged it into the ponytail that it had been before.

When the door opened, she was greeted by a youthful male, also Selenian, who seemed only partly concerned for her condition. “You’re late.”

“Thanks for the update. Want a weather report while I’m here?”

“Did you sleep in or something? Wild night last night?”

“Oh yeah, I was just pounding drinks and banging everything that looked capable,” she chided annoyingly. They turned the corner and nearly ran headlong into a short-haired Zeltron who was focused on her datapad.

“Ma’am!” the male sputtered as her sudden scrutiny looked them over.

“Sergeant Jelenko,” she said almost too flatly, “I hope you enjoyed your orgy yesterday, unless my ears deceived me.”

“N-no ma’am, I...”

“*You* need to get a towel.” The mercenary stepped gingerly around them and continued on her way. “Once you’re dry, come see me in my office. We’ve got a lot of work today, and you’re already late.”

“*You’re already laaate*,” she whispered in a mocking tone once the woman was out of earshot.

“Well congrats, Jen. It’s only zero-nine and you managed to piss off the Red Devil.”

“Sod off, Trev.” Her companion seemed to have nothing better to do than follow her, so she continued to suffer his antics while she walked to the locker room. *Good thing I’ve got a spare uniform in there.*

“So what’s it like being an Arconan’s adjutant? I hear she likes women. Wouldn’t surprise me if that’s why you were hired.”

“Frack off already, you nut-brained kark.” He was about to add another snarky joke, but she was able to open the locker room door and shut him outside.

Sergeant Jennel Jelenko took her time drying off and getting changed. Today was one of those days where she gave absolutely zero fracks about anything, especially after having to wade through the typhoon raging outside just to get to work. *And some genius decided to put in the regs that we can’t use an umbrella while in uniform.* It was an infuriating combination that only made her mood sour the more she thought about it.

Peeling off her olive drab jumpsuit that passed for a work uniform, she stripped out of her wet clothing while she ran her boots underneath an air dryer mounted on a janitorial droid that was doing its rounds. *I need to put a spare pair of boots in here,* she mused as she slipped out of the last clinging confines of her clothes. As she bagged her wet attire, she glanced in the mirror, remembering Trevontin’s comment about why she was hired. She ran a hand over her flat stomach and contemplated doing some “stress relief exercises” before work, but dismissed the idea and returned to getting dressed. *I’d do me,* she thought with a chuckle as she passed another glance at the mirror.

“Adjutant” they called her, but everyone knew that was just military-speak for “secretary.” When she was on time, it was her job to make caf or tea for the boss, run messages, coordinate meetings, and generally run errands. Just a little time ago, she’d been doing combat patrols with her squad on Nancora. While safer, this seemed like something of a demotion — a punishment for doing something wrong that she hadn’t actually done. Part of her wanted to do horribly at this job so they might fire her and send her back to the line.

Once in fresh clothes and her boots only slightly damp, Jennel walked briskly for the Quaestor’s office which, like much of Fort Blindshot, was recently installed. If it weren’t for the spacer attire though, she might’ve thought the Zeltron was actually in the service. Haircut aside, the red woman definitely had a thing for blasters, and she was always trying to butt into the DDF’s business.

Stepping into the office, she could feel some cloud in the air that wasn’t just the weather. “Mornin’ ma’am. Sorry about earlier. The weather was hell on the commute this morning.”

“S’fine, sergeant.” The Zeltron sipped at a cup of tea, almost showing it off as though to make a point — that she’d had to make it herself. “I sent you some documents that need to be looked over and passed out to the appropriate command staffs. Should be on your terminal.”

*Great. I get to proofread your holomail again. Totally what I joined up for.* “Yes ma’am.”

Jelenko took to her desk, positioned by the door so she could somewhat filter visitors for the Quaestor, and booted up her terminal. A notification popped up immediately to notify her of six messages pending review, all from her boss. *Six?! Where do you find the time to do this?* She eyed the red woman curiously, knowing that the merc wasn’t one for late nights in the office, meaning she hammered these out this morning, or they were piling up on her own terminal before getting all the bits and pieces together.

Blue eyes pored over the documents, some of which were requisitions requests, some training recommendations. All of them would be further annoyance to the brass, which secretly pleased her.

Some of the training exercises looked interesting, even bold when compared to some of the more mundane activities the DDF had. What it lacked was the refinement of military bureaucracy, which Jelenko spliced into the docs rigorously. It would at least mean that they didn’t pass by the upper echelons without perusal. The relationship that Galeres — the Quaestor’s particular subgroup within Arcona — had with the military was relatively underdeveloped compared to that of Arcona on the whole. It was clear that the Zeltron was trying to cement a deeper relationship, but it seemed a vain effort, at best.

An hour passed in relative silence between them before a soft *ding* echoed from the mercenary’s terminal. “Proposals are reviewed, Miss Arronen. Added in the usual tweaks.”

“Thanks Sergeant.” She opened the files and reviewed the changes, glancing at Jelenko periodically. “What’d you think?”

“Of what?”

“Of the proposals.”

*She’s asking my opinion on something? Is this the same Red Devil that everyone is always talking about?* Jennel had been working for the Quaestor for a little over a month, and this was the first time she’d been asked this sort of question. “Um, well... Permission to speak freely, ma’am?” The Zeltron nodded. “They’re not bad plans on paper, but they’re very simplistic in some areas and over-complicated in others. What’s more, the complicated ones are really out of the norm for... well, *any* military I’ve come across.”

“Such as?”

“Like doing force-on-force tactical exercises with blasters. Got it, they’re set to *stun*, but that’s still a risk that might hurt some folk more than you planned for. I’ve seen a guy go full catatonic after a low-power stun shot. Another guy *died* because he had a mechanical heart that didn’t like *non-lethal* shock rounds.”

The Zeltron pondered this seriously for some time, her brow furrowed in thought. “Any suggestions?”

Jelenko paused. “Not... right now, no. There’s simulation equipment out there, but we don’t have any on hand.”

Question upon question was posed to the Selenian, all of which she answered as best she could: methods, equipment, and alternatives to each. *What is going on here?* After so many queries, the Quaestor finally seemed satisfied with the information and silence passed over the room again, each working on their own small tasks. Arronen seemed to be concentrating particularly hard on what was on her screen and, after almost an hour of sidelong glances, Jennel couldn’t hold it in anymore.

“Are you alright, ma’am? Do you need me to get you anything?”

“M’fine. Just...” She leaned back in her chair and let loose a long sigh. “I can’t figure out this system you guys have. So much paperwork and red tape just to do a simple training exercise.”

“Some would say it keeps people accountable,” she chuckled.

“I’d say it also keeps us from doing anything of real value. If I had the authority, I could set up a LAAT air assault event two days from now, but I can’t do that with the current system. Between requisition requests, risk management forms, and just getting the personnel around...” Her speech wandered off into frustrated grumbling.

Her curiosity was getting the better of her. “Why are you so interested in our training?”

The merc looked almost blankly at her screen momentarily before returning to her scrutinous typing. “I don’t want another Nancora. I want our guys ready — *better* than ready — so that we don’t come home with so many filled body bags.”

*Oookaaay, that was a bit heavier than I was going for.* Jelenko quietly returned to her other work, contemplating the conversation in a corner of her mind while she went over expenditure figures and supply requisitions. Blindshot was hastily constructed, so there was plenty of improvement that could be made. At least that’s what Arronen kept saying. They’d all thought the red woman was “cray-cray” when she first showed up, but some of it was starting to make sense the more she heard within the confines of their office.

Rain continued to fall audibly while they worked in relative silence, nearing the lunch hour before Jelenko's desk comm chimed; likely a message for the Quaestor. "This is Sergeant Jelenko, Quaestor's office. How can I help you sir or ma'am?"

*"Sergeant, this is Major Kenth with DDF Command. We got hits on our regular sensor sweeps in your area. Might be Collective remnants."*

"Ma'am?"

"Sec." The Zeltron stood briskly and walked over to Jennel's desk, leaning over her shoulder to talk more clearly into the comm unit. "Major, this is Qyreia Arronen. You got any more information on that sensor hit?"

*"Affirmative. Estimated two squads on a small island about three hundred kilometers to your southeast. Pretty sure they're making repairs on a transport. Whether they try to run or attack a terrestrial target is unknown."*

"Understood. We'll coordinate a response on our end and update as things develop. Arronen out." Almost instinctively Jelenko cut the call, which seemed to please her boss. "Get a hold of our quick reaction force company and tell them to go to Condition Red. Twenty minutes and I want them on the landing pads ready to go."

"I'll contact the LAAT flights on duty as well."

"Thank you," Arronen said as she flitted about the room, strapping a pistol to her hip and a rifle from behind a storage cabinet.

"Are you going too, ma'am?"

"I was planning on it." She looked at the Selenian, who seemed fidgety in her seat. "You're welcome to come along too. I could use a good soldier with me."

"Really?" Jennel barely contained her excitement at getting out of the office.

"Grab your gear and a long-range comm unit just in case."

*Yes ma'am!* She was out of her seat before the words had time to manifest in her mouth. Like most of the soldiers in the office, her weapon was in the arms room on the bottom floor, which she'd need to expedite with some name-dropping. Otherwise, it'd be like any other day, and they would take their time about pulling the rifle out and writing down all the information. She nearly bowled into Corporal Trevontin on her way through the main office area, likely about to drop off some report or another.

"You're in a hurry!"

“Action time! Can’t talk!”

“Lucky you!” he yelled after her as she continued on into the lift.

The Quaestor was already at the door by the time Jennel had collected her kit and cajoled the armorer into handing over her blaster and a combat load of ammunition. Getting the backpack-style comm unit was no easier. She almost felt embarrassed when she saw the merc’s displeased expression.

“Let’s hurry. We’re already running behind.”

“Sorry ma’am,” Jelenko said as they walked out and toward their waiting speeder. “The desk jockeys didn’t want to speed things up.”

“It’s fine.” Arronen’s tone was almost reassuring. “You seem really excited. Office work not your cup of tea?”

The Selenian bit her lip. “Not my place to say, ma’am.”

“Speak frackin’ freely, Sergeant. You might’ve noticed already, but I’m not one of the ‘suits’.”

She laughed openly at that. “Fair. I miss being on the line, ma’am. To be totally honest, you have a bit of a reputation with the guys. They call you the Red Devil because of how you get mad sometimes.”

“I prefer Red Qek, but still catchy I suppose.”

“Red Qek?”

“It was my handle back when I was a smuggler. S’got a sweet spot in my heart.”

“I’ll let the guys know,” Jennel chuckled as the starport’s landing pads came into view. Dark specks flanked by large white blobs rapidly materialized into soldiers and LAAT/i gunships waiting for the briefing and final takeoff notice.

“Any other rumors or fun stuff I should know?”

“Well…” Jennel rolled her eyes hesitantly. “Some folks think you hired me because you wanna get into my skivvies.” Qyreia snorted slightly, aspirating several chuckles out as she brought the speeder to a stop just outside of hearing range of the troops yelling over the loud gunships’ engines. “What? You’re into women, aren’t ya?”

“Technically speaking,” she said, rubbing some of the laughter from her eyes, “I’m ‘into’ both men and women, but I’m happily taken.”

“Oh...”

“Why? Disappointed?”

Jennel coughed awkwardly. “No.”

Qyreia laughed again as they both exited the speeder and started walking toward the assembly area. “Well, if it’s any consolation, and to quote one of my favorite holodramas, ‘Were I unwed, I would take you in a manly fashion.’”

“I... Thanks?”

“Don’t think about it too much, Sergeant. Just keep your rifle ready, your head down, and stay close to me.”

*I guess you’ll be watching my choobies either way, she thought with a smile as they moved toward the gunships and the waiting troops. If this is what it’s like being an adjutant for these Arconan types, I think I can live with that.* She didn’t even seem to notice the downpour of rain still falling on their heads; and even though it was dark, once they got sight of the Collective troops, they’d make plenty of light to see by.