

JORM NA'TREJ

SCHOLAE PALATINAE



SOLID GUESSES

A FICTION FOR GJW XIII PHASE I

"Yes, Governor. I will make the time."

A sigh escaped Amara Cirrus' lips, inaudible in the tumult. Damage control teams and medics worked at a frantic pace all around her, caring for damaged flesh and machinery. Her own security forces ushered civilians from one place to the other to clear escape routes and workspaces.

"Any word from above, ma'am?" a voice asked from her left. Amara locked her azure eyes onto the speaker's grey ones and recognized him as one of her newer subordinates.

"Sergeant Mellir," she acknowledged him, "we're expecting visitors from the Brotherhood."

"After *this*?"

Shock and anger colored Mellir's question as he pointed at the chaos around them.

"I don't like it either, Sergeant," she replied. "But my hands are tied. The Brotherhood claims foul play and is sending *special investigators* everywhere to prove it. And the administration is giving them the benefit of the doubt, at least for now."

"So are we supposed to let them roam free, Ma'am?"

"Like hell we are. Our visitors are expected within the hour. Receive them on the landing pad and bring them straight to my office," she instructed.

"Aye, Ma'am," Mellir confirmed and went about his tasks. Amara suppressed another sigh. Breathing flatly to avoid the worst of the acrid, burning stench in the air, she returned to her office and reviewed the footage from the satellite cameras high above Lyra Colony on her desk.

Heavy jamming scarred the pictures, but the occasional shot was clear enough to make out the Iron Navy insignia. The cruisers had wreaked havoc in space and nearly cracked the

colony's shields when Principate reinforcements arrived. Then they had retreated in good order without losing more than a few starfighters.

Bastards.

A beep drew her attention, and she switched to live cameras in the hangar. To her dismay, the device had been damaged and recorded everything with a heavy blue tint. The long suppressed sigh finally escaped her as she logged the malfunction for maintenance and zoomed in.

The screen showed her a Decimator with its hatch open. The stylized cog on the hull identified it not as Iron Navy, but one of the Brotherhood's seven Clans. *Scholae Palatinae, the Imperial Clan*, she consulted her diplomatic primer.

Two figures stepped out of the ship. The taller one, a man, unbuckled his gun belt and dropped it on top of the ramp without missing a step. The young woman following him put hers down more gently and followed her companion. *Those don't look like classic Imperials.* Amara watched Sergeant Mellir and his team stop them to administer a thorough scan. She used the opportunity to freeze a frame of each visitor.

Similar features, same hairstyle. Are they siblings? There's something on the woman's face... damn this camera. Her apparel looks familiar though. Some kind of uniform? And the guy... nasty smile. Civilian clothes. Is that a tattoo on his arm? Flames and chains? Wait... She typed a query into her terminal and was rewarded with a loading icon. *Who knows how long that will take.*

A knock on the door ended her wait. "Come in."

Sergeant Mellir led their two guests into the office.

"They are clean, Ma'am," he announced, "the lady has a datapad and a comlink, the mister a comlink and a few credit coins. Both wear a degree of body armor without enhancements," Mellir reported.

“Thank you, Sergeant. Stay with us,” Amara replied, shutting out her prejudice and pointing towards two chairs in front of her desk. She focused on being an investigator and took her first professional look at the visitors. The first thing she noticed was their skin: almost as dark as her own, maybe a shade more reddish. Mellir, already grey before his time, looked sickly pale in present company.

“I am Amara Cirrus, head of security for Lyra Colony,” she introduced herself. “And you are?”

“Jorm,” the man answered with a half smile on his lips and a twinkle in his citrine eyes.

“She’s my cousin, Mica.”

“Mika Vres,” the woman said quietly. Amara focused on her and caught a glimpse of her yellow-green irises before Mica broke eye contact. Instead, she noticed the orange tattoos on Vres’ cheeks, and puzzle pieces clicked in her head.

“That uniform. You were with the Kiffu Guardians, Miss Vres?”

Mica cast a glance at her cousin, who in turn hadn’t taken his eyes off Amara, before she answered.

“Yes. Field Tech Agent,” she gave her former function. *So she’s a Kiffar, and by extension, he is too.*

“And you,” Amara turned to Jorm, “are something completely different.”

She turned the screen so he could see the results of her query, several chain-and-fire motifs and their predominant association.

“Guilty,” the man answered chipperly and presented his own radiant tattoo. “Fifteen years with the Blazing Chain.”

“So, remind me why I shouldn’t arrest you on the spot for belonging to a criminal organization,” Amara inquired coldly.

“Cause you have no dirt on me, and I’m legit employed by a sovereign government you’re not at war with,” Jorm replied with a wolfish grin.

“Yet,” Mellir scoffed from his spot behind the visitors, next to the door.

Jorm leaned back in his chair far enough to topple it. A leisurely lifted boot under Amara’s desk turned a fall into a wobbly laying position, and he grinned at Mellir from down under. “Yet.”

“If you’re here to stop that from happening, you’re presenting a terrible case so far,” Amara snapped. Jorm righted himself and looked back at her.

“Fwec ‘presenting a case,’ that’s what talking airheads are for. We’re just here to tell you that you’re being played, and back it up right quick and dirty,” he stated.

Amara clenched her teeth. “Talk.”

“You know about the Collective,” Jorm not quite asked.

“Yes.”

“They’ve got a massive hate-on for the Brotherhood,” Jorm continued.

“I’m aware,” Amara replied dryly.

“Did you know they’re leveraging racial abilities to their advantage?”

“How so, and what is the significance,” Amara inquired, eager to get to the point.

“Ever heard of Shikari Huntresses?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“They’re Kiffar. Maybe they’re clones, I don’t know. Damn good trackers though,” Jorm explained.

“Do you have a point,” Amara waved him along.

Jorm rolled his eyes and put his hand on the desk. Amara watched his pupils grow wide for a moment, then he grabbed a pen and a slip of paper from her desk and jotted down her login and password.

“Sithspit,” Amara cursed. Her hand wandered to her holster without conscious thought. She stopped herself when Jorm leaned back again, still with that smile on his face and shaking his head slightly.

“I heard rumors about that ability, but I never believed them,” she muttered.

“The Shikari all have it. Now imagine what one of those gals could do with a tad of cosmetic surgery and janitor’s overalls,” Jorm fed her his thoughts. A credit chip appeared between his fingers and started to dance over his knuckles.

Amara shook her head and exhaled slowly.

“Provided you don’t try to sell me Bantha dung here... whom am I looking for?”

“Someone new-ish,” Jorm replied. “Woman in her mid twenties. Listed as Kiffar or something equally humanoid.”

Mica leaned closer and placed her datapad in front of Amara. Biometric data and pictures.

“We suspect that such an infiltrator would have taken a job with maintenance or security,” the former Guardian explained. “She’d likely not work completely alone, but as the only Huntress or maybe a set of two in the cell, depending on the availability of cosmetic alterations. Too many lookalikes would give them away. Due to the extensive modifications Shikari experience, she would also have dodged medical exams or fudged them. I can help with the recovery.”

“And you are sure I will find at least one such woman if I put those biometrics into the query?”

Amara made sure.

Jorm produced a fistfull of high-value credit coins and deposited them on the table.

"I bet on it."

Amara massaged her temples for a moment. *Should I really consider this? They might be trying to fool me. On the other hand, that guy is so unconcerned... no sign of stress. He tells the truth, or he's a great actor.*

She reached for the datapad. Behind her visitors, Sergeant Mellir reached for his blaster.

Amara's eyes grew wide. Adrenaline shot into her veins and the world grew slow and sluggish. She saw Mellir's blaster leave its holster. She saw the hate in Mellir's eyes. Her gaze, slow as a snail, wandered to Jorm, still smiling at her.

And then, in a reality moving at glacial speed, the smiling Kiffar moved *fast*. His hand shot forward and clawed the coins from the desk. Hips and torso twisted, his head shuffled to the side just in time to make way for a blaster bolt to pass unobstructed.

Then Jorm's arm whipped around, and the silvery coins went flying towards Mellir, breaking the sound barrier with telltale *cracks*, and perforating the Sergeant's torso. Red bloomed behind him and painted a violent rose while the coins ricocheted from the wall.

Time contracted again and resumed its normal flow. Jorm moved to the side, mirrored by Mica on the other side of the desk.

“As suspected: not alone,” Mica observed.

The door opened and armed guards poured in.

“Everybody down! Miss Cirrus, what happened here,” somebody shouted.

“Stand down,” Amara yelled in response.

“Ma’am?” The Guard speaking eyed Jorm carefully. The Kiffar had not moved an inch, just stood there, coiled and ready to go, with that cursed smile on his lips.

“Stand. Down,” Amara repeated. She looked from guard to guard, unsure if they belonged to Mellir or not.

Jorm relaxed and retrieved his chair.

“No hostility there, just confusion,” he offered his host.

Amara nodded and clenched her teeth.

“Guards. Get out. Stay silent. I will be with you in five minutes,” she instructed, and glared at the men until they were gone. Then she turned to Jorm again.

“You’re not just a pirate. You’re a Force user. And you expected something like this. Just who the hell are you?”

He looked down on her, citrine eyes drilling into her azure.

"I'm Jorm Na'trej, Executor of the Scholae Empire, attack dog of the Empress and tied for third place in the chain of command. I'm Darth Vader in sexy, the living embodiment of Palpatine's unbridled boldness, and you're stalling. Will you get moving or are you waiting for a bloody dinner invitation?"

He cocked his head sideways.

“Wait, are you?”

“Is this really the time to flirt, Jorm,” Mica intervened.

“If you knew [my ex](#), you’d be the one pushing for it!”

Amara left the Kiffar cousins to their bickering and opened a com line.

“Governor? I think I can cast reasonable doubt upon that Iron Navy attack.”

END