It was a curious thing, living right on the border between life and death. Jon Silvon wasn’t a poetic soul by any stretch, for all that he made his living on clever speech and little wordplays, but there was simply no other way to describe Foothold.

A city perched on the very edge of the toxicity zone of Kaist, it was quite literally on the border between breathable air above, and deadly toxic gas below. Hence ‘the border between life and death.’ It was inescapable; everywhere you went in the city, you were reminded just how close these people were, more so than any other settlement on the planet, more so even than the other Quohari tribes, just how close they were to a world that was death to them. If the machines holding them up every faltered for even a moment, or the struts and rivets holding them in place gave way…

Well, it colored your perception of the world.

“You know Artemis,” Jon said to the R3 unit trailing at his side, “I think this place gets a bad rap. A crying shame, that’s what it is.”

The astromech beeped sarcastically at him.

“I mean, *sure*, it’s not a prime vacation spot or anything like that, but,” he looked over the edge of the catwalk he was strolling over, taking in the sight of the black mountain rock beneath, as it trailed down into the deadly blue clouds beneath, “At least the view is… scenic?”

The Summit didn’t know he was down here. Not that he imagined they’d object, of course, but all the same. Sometimes, a mercenary just liked to get out and stretch his legs a bit. Besides, for all that many, the Vatali in particular, would find the city of metal and mountains ugly, dirty, and dark - and it was all those things, so far from the light of the twin suns - Jon couldn’t help but take a certain… comfort in the familiarity he found there.

Jon could play the part of the highborn or the noble, well enough to blend in in the vaunted towers of the Empress or Aura’s precious Praxeum, but he didn’t belong to those places anymore than he belonged in the Republic Senate Building. He’d spent his life in spaceships and stations, moving from place to place where he and his grandfather - and eventually just him, could ply their talents, often in places far less reputable than his current places of employment. He was already a man before he’d acquired the *Carnival*, and that ship was the closest thing he’d had to a home.

He hadn’t been part of the mission to convince Mayor Jalan to throw his support behind Odan-Urr, and the Jedi rarely had cause to venture so far down. They were, officially anyway, the Empress’ obedient wards. Quohari matters seldom concerned them, unless they were invited.

They weren’t invited often.

But then, Jon wasn’t a Jedi. And while he didn’t often *hide* his associations with the Odanites, he also didn’t advertise them. Theirs was a… complicated arrangement, and that was all that needed to be said on the matter.

The point was, Jon wasn’t a Jedi. And he was, on this particular occasion, *invited*. Would wonders never cease?

As Jon and Artemis passed through a series of backstreets, following the instructions they’d been given, the pair heard a group of voices - young ones - and the sound of tools and banging metal.

*Now what could* that *be about, I wonder?*

Without missing a beat, Jon twirled on a heel, and walked down a back alley that twisted right and left before letting out into a large open space surrounded by the backs of various buildings. It was some kind of back lot, the sort made by an architectural mistake that left an open space between buildings that wasn’t meant to be there.

He saw what was making the grand racket - a group of children (he was fairly certain, though there were one or two from species he did not recognize), perhaps a half dozen or so, clambering about a mass of twisted metal pipes, each one clutching a welding or cutting tool in their hands, and carrying even more pieces of scrap metal. Jon didn’t say a word, only calmly observing the youths, trying to puzzle out what it was that they were trying to make - for they were obviously making something.

Still it wasn’t long before one spotted him, and let out a hooting call to his friends. Jon was about to raise a hand to calm them down, let them know he wasn’t here to get them in trouble, but almost before he could speak a word, the lot of them scattered with astonishing speed, dropping tools and materials to the metal ground and scampering away into windows, or over rooftops and fences. In the time it took him to realize what was happening, every single one of the children had vanished into the cityscape.

Jon and Artemis were left alone in the empty square, staring up at the mass of… something. It was a collection of scrap metal, pipes and stands and rivets, that formed together into some sort of convoluted knot, with heads that tapered off like leaves on the ends of plant stems.

Jon turned without a word, and made his way back to the road he’d turned from, still wondering what that little display had been about.

 Jon and Artemis stood on a poorly lit street, what little sunlight that managed to penetrate this deeply long since faded into dusk, and from dusk - shockingly quickly - into night. The pair approached one of many airlocked doors on the dirty street, the one specified on the instructions given to him.

 “You wanna know, or should I?” Jon said to his droid. When the little astromech backed up from the door, Jon shrugged. “Coward.”

 The captain of the carnival steeled himself, and raised a hand to knock… only for the door to slam open of its own volition, before a high moving object crashed into Jon, knocking him onto his back.

 “Cap’n Silvon!” a giggled the togruta child now pinning him to the ground. Jon grunted, but was still too dazed to offer much else.

 “Vatee Tem,” a stern old voice called out from the doorway. “Get *off* the poor man this instant! Is that anyway to treat a guest I ask you?”

 “No grandfather,” Vatee said, pushing herself to her feet, and offering her hand to the captain - the captain who was easily three and a half times her size, and two and a half times her age. A few feet away, Jon could hear the static-filled beeping that constituted Artemis’ ‘laughter.’

 “Laugh it up, rust bucket,” Jon hissed under his breath. “Can’t wait to see how these kids handle all your shiny parts tonight.”

 “We’re glad you could make it to our little gathering, Captain,” the elderly togruta said, hobbling up to shake Jon’s hand. Shrano Tem had the look of a man who’d been downright imposing in his youth - Jon gathered that he was a soldier at one point - but had been worn down and bent by years enough that Jon, a tall man himself, stood more than two heads and a pair of shoulder over the aging patriarch.

 “Come in, come in, Captain. Everyone’s already here, and my daughter’s nearly finished prepping the meal!”

 The inside of the Tem residence was, like all of Foothold that Jon had seen, dark, spartan, and more closely resembling the inside of a poorly lit spaceship than home to a family of five. Yet, if one looked closer, they began to see the little details that made it more than that.

 There were five who lived in this house, Jon knew. Shran, his daughter, and her three children. He didn’t know what had happened to their father, and felt like it wouldn’t be wise to ask.

 “Thank you for inviting us,” Jon said stiffly. Normally he was the height of eloquence, but this situation was… a little out of his comfort zone.

 “Are you kidding?” Vatee said as she trailed along side him. “You and Vez *saved us* Jon! And momma says you *always* have to show your gratitude when people help you.”

 Jon couldn’t exactly argue with that, though it wasn’t like he was some knight in shining armor either. In truth, he likely never would’ve known that a group of quorahi had been kidnapped by slavers if the Odanites hadn’t hired him to go and get them back.

 “Where’s Vez?” one of the youngest cried out when they saw him.

 “Sadly, Vez was preoccupied tonight.” Preoccupied, in fact, with her newly discovered Force-sensitivity, and learning how *not* to turn into a yellow-eyed mass murderer because of it. He had a feeling she wouldn’t appreciate him sharing that at the drop of a hat, however. She was still getting used to it.

 *I guess I can relate.*

 The meal was a simple one, by his standards at least. Though he had a feeling it was extravagant by theirs.

Jon looked over to see what his silver and gold companion was getting up to. Artemis was busy entertaining some of the youngest children, who were absolutely *fascinated* by her various tools and equipments, or just dazzled by her shiny silver and gold finish. He knew the old astromech well enough to see how much she was reveling in the attention, much to his own disapointment. She was going to be an absolute nightmare to deal with now that her ego was being inflated. Jon shrugged mentally. Nothing to do for it at the moment; he wouldn’t begrudge the children their fun.

 Jon sighed. Well, if nothing else it was an entertaining… evening… wait.

 Jon looked up at the wall on the far side of the room. He hadn’t actually noticed it before, but hanging on the wall was a tapestry, depicting a shape that, now that he looked at it, was something he’d already seen once before tonight. Against a white background was a bright green knot, a series of curved and twisting lines that shaped together into a tangled cross.

 “What exactly is that?” he asked politely, pointing to the tapestry.

 “That, Captain,” Shran answered, “Is the icon of the Folk of lower Kiast - the Quorahi, as the Empire and their kind call us. Why do you ask?”

 “Because I saw someone *building* it tonight,” he answered. Oh certainly, in two dimensions it was only a bit of intricate linework, but if one rendered it *three* dimensions, as a sculpture instead of an illustration? Well, Jon suspected it would look something might similar to that tangled mess of scrap metal he’d interrupted the construction of on his way here.

 He related the story to Shran and his family, and the old man smiled knowingly.

 “They call themselves ‘the Puzzleknotters’ you see. A group of youths, all caught up in that bit of rebellion that everyone gets into at their age, all full of fire and passion. They’ve taken to building the Quorahi icon in the streets at night, whole sculptures cropping up while the rest of Foothold is asleep. They use scrap metal, pipes, ship parts, anything they can get their hands on without being noticed. ‘A show of unity against the Vatali,’ they call it.”

 “And what do you call it?” Jon asked.

 “Kids being kids,” Shran shrugged. “Let me tell you something Captain, as long as the Vatali are up *there*, and we’re down *here,* there are gonna be people, kids most especially, who aren’t happy with that arrangement.”

 “Heh. Youthful rebellion. Some things are universal, eh Shran?”

 “Some things,” the old man said cryptically. “But not all. See, it’s what they make that statue *out of* that makes me think they *get it*.”

 “Garbage?” he asked, but knew it was wrong the second the words left his mouth.

 “Scrap and salvage, sure as anything. That’s what this whole *city’s* made out of though. We build out of whatever we can find. And you know what? I think we’ve done a pretty good job.”

 As Jon sat in the house made from scrap metal, in a city on the brink of a toxic wasteland, he had to agree. For a place as close to the bottom of their world as they were able to get without suffocating, the people of Foothold had built quite a bit for themselves.