

38 ABY
December 1st, 2020



An Unexpected Presence

A submission to Merry Sithmas! Fiction Competition
From Dossier # 12681
Augur Alara Deathbane

**19:00 HOURS,
LATE WELONA/DECEMBER 38 ABY
Estle City, Selen
Dajorra System**

Alara stiffened her back in the cold, winter winds. Her deep breath felt icy coming in just as it had shown to others around her coming out. She stepped off of the carrier shuttle, and took the nearby droid's cybernetic hand as her feet hit the smooth ground of Estle City below her.

"Baggage can be found just around the other side of the ship, Ma'am. Would you like my services in carrying your luggage?" the over-the-top polite droid responded according to his directions.

"That will not be necessary as I did not bring anything with me but this satchel here," Alara replied. "Thank you, I'll be off." She tipped her head from inside of her hood and started walking off of the space port area.

And here it is... after ages of my going away. It feels good to be home, Alara looked around at the entrancingly beautiful marbled city and gulped as her eyes reached the top. The citadel. I'm sure that's where they will be celebrating tonight. This is probably not going to go so well for me. She sighed, and made her way through the familiar streets, not really considering the scenery around her. There will be plenty of time to enjoy being home once I've fully made myself known... if I survive, that is.

She knew that not many would understand why she went away. She hardly gave any warning, and whatever message she was able to send to someone, it was brief and straight to the point -- *I've gone to explore the Force. This is something I have to do for me.* Memories flashed through her troubled mind of those she knew she had already lost. Gregryck was very supportive and promised to take good care of Jae'lle and Artemis while she was gone. However, her younger sister ended all communication between them. As the newest Consul to the Clan Alara had left behind, she knew it was necessary for her sister to do what she did, but it still stung deeply. Shadow Nighthunter was the last true family she had left, and being left behind by her also meant being left behind by her two adorable nephews. Her stomach tightened. She was in a different ring of the city which meant she was closer to her confrontation. In the deep sanctions of her heart, she truly hoped she didn't lose her family here, too.

Alara had learned so much on her travels as a rogue. It wasn't the first time she had gone away for a while, but it was the first time she had done so as an Arconan. Even though she kept contact with the Arconan leadership when necessary, she still felt as if she had betrayed her trusted friends that took her in with ease after she had fled Scholae Palatinae. The Augur hoped that the promise of what intel she had gained over her journeys would be of benefit to the clan, and that the clan would at least appreciate her efforts.

At last, her feet landed on the Huascar Ring. It wouldn't be long now until she found out exactly how they felt. Gesturing her neck from side-to-side, she cracked the bones in her spine for some release of tension and headed towards the citadel.

"HALT! This event at the citadel is for Arconan Supremacy Members only!" a human guardsman warned the half-Sephi and stepped in front of the massive doors so as to block her entry.

"I *aamm* an Arconan Supremacy Member. Please let me pass to join the festivities." Alara glared at the human through the golden tuft of hair in her face.

"I don't believe you. Identification please." the guardsman demanded. Alara muttered something about being gone and forgotten in merely a year's time while she fumbled through her satchel to find her wallet. After a few swears under her breath, she handed the guard a rather rough-looking, outdated form of identification.

"This is from before the last Great War... How long have you been gone?" the guardsman's eyes widened.

"None of your damn business! Now let me in so I can get some new identification and speak with my superiors about my mission!" she scowled. Without a word, the guardsman lifted his hands halfway, as if surrendering, and stepped out of her way. While the doors swung open, Alara whipped out her braid from inside of her hood and rested the fabric on her shoulders. The hall was cleared and ornate as usual for this time of year, but raised voices could be heard on the other side of the walls. The Augur raised a gloved hand to her brow, flipped over her bangs, and headed onwards.

"And THAASSSs when I said to the lady, Pardon me miss, but who ya think yer talkin tuh? Some sert of Wookiehh?!" she could hear the beloved ryn, Kordath, barking his story from beyond the grand hall's entrance to the left of the hallway. A burst of laughter, notably from Zujenia, Lucine, and Alaisy, erupted into the halls while some Wookiee shouting from Kelviin protested in response.

Should I say anything, or just walk in? Alara hesitated at the archway for a moment. She decided to allow herself a peer into the facilities.

In Sithmas fashion, the grand ballroom was absolutely extravagant. A feasting table serving the finest of Estle City's dishes was overflowing with grains, fruits, meats, local wines, and ales. Kordath was sitting to the right of the consul's chair, gulping down some more ale while his Zujenia sat beside him and giggled into his arm. Kelviin was stomping at the opposite end of the table near the large ornate fireplace while Reiden Karr, another member originally from Scholae Palatinae, tried to reason with the angry creature. Lucine Vasano, the clan's consul, paid no mind to Kelviin's dismay while seated at the far end of the table in a fashionable

chaise suited for her role. Aiden Lee was at her right, biting back a smile as he reached for a leg from the nearest poultry dish. The quaestors of Galeres and Qel-Droma, Junazee and Tali Sroka, were conversing over what seemed to be troubling business as opposed to talks one would have at a party. When Alara wavered her ears to get a better sense of what they were saying, she realized they were merely discussing battle maneuvering and decided she couldn't be bothered for now.

One couple Alara was shocked to see was Wyn's family, Marick and Atyiru. Wyn, her previous lover, was sitting next to his brother as the famous man and wife were exchanging sly flirtations over wine. *I thought that chick died? What else did I frakkin miss?* As if fate would have it no other way, Wyn's eyes caught sight of the half-Sephi peering at the door.

"It appears we have a visitor... an unexpected presence... for the holidays." He stared, not showing any emotion as the other Arconae members hushed to listen and turned to follow his gaze. Alara tried her hardest not to show her embarrassment by tucking her flickering Sephi ears under her hair and decided to make a dramatic show of Wyn's announcement. She raised her arms out to present herself in a seductive fashion.

"Yes, Sherlock Lucas, it is I. The prodigal daughter has returned. Anybody miss me?" she finished her minor speech by placing her hands on her athletically shaped hips and leaned to one side as if to pose for her glamour shot.

"Get over here you crazy blonde!! You've been missing out on all the booze!" Zujenia skipped from her chair and jumped the amazon with a huge, very tight hug, then dragged her friend to the nearest empty chair and shoved her into it. Alara, quite bemused and out of breath from the encounter, let out a laugh and sat, pretending as if she had a choice to do so.

"Why thank you for welcoming me back to the table! Do catch me up on everything I missed while I was away! As for you, how did you raise from the grave?" Alara pointed to Atyiru with a smirk and a cocked eyebrow. Though the Miralukan couldn't see her with natural eyes, she sensed the point and smiled her gorgeous teeth back at the Sephi.

Before she could respond, Alaisy barged in with a pint full of ale and shouted, "NECROMANCERS, BABY! WHO KNEW KRATH ADHERENTS HAD EM?!" The room laughed in response, warming Alara's heart so she didn't feel so frightened.

"Of course so much has changed. You did happen to miss an entire war," Wyn spoke emotionlessly.

"Trust me, if I wasn't gone for important matters, I would have been here." She folded back into her chair and graciously received a glass of wine from Grot, the Trandoshan, next to her.

"What could be more important than fighting a war to protect your people and city?" Aru Law interrogated from crossed arms to Alara's right.

She mouthed the words to reply, but Karran Val'teo spoke first: "Something we weren't made aware of, apparently? And no intel given to anyone?"

"Well, not *just* anyone. But apparently I'm also not *anyone* if I didn't hear about it." Sera Kaern huffed.

"I know it all seems strange, and definitely unlike my character..." Alara began to explain.

"Oh, no, you're really good at falling off the edge of the world. This isn't the first time." Wyn shot back. Marick whacked his arm so as to restrain his brother, which worked for a time. The young Human gave Alara a look which she could only interpret as a sign of hurt.

"My past put aside," Alara began with a blink of her yellow eyes, "believe it or not, this wasn't just for me to get away on vacation." She stopped, glanced over at Lucine, and received a nod of approval. "I was away studying the Krath as instructed by a master of mine. And I was also doing some research for the clan on ways to de-program droids and destroy the Collective from the inside out."

The room went quiet for a few breaths. Kordath cleared his throat, and asked the question on everyone's mind, "And did ye find anythun, lass?"

"Well, I grew very close to the Force and nature over this time. Learned a lot about the Krath craft and discovered secrets about myself that I didn't even know. As for intel to help our fight against the Collective, I know I'm close to it. I've got some manuscripts that speak of fighting enemies that seem to be droids---" she was interrupted by Lucine's shaking head, and rephrased her sentence, "--- I'm close. I'll share the details with all of you once I find the answers I'm looking for."

Murmurs began to rise around the room until Lucine snapped her fingers for peace and quiet. "Enough of business, this is a party for *frak's* sake. Alara, keep your drinking. Let's leave business for the new year."

Alara breathed in a sigh of relief and did as she was told, enjoying the delicious, familiar wine of home pouring down her throat. She could feel her anxieties slipping further into the abyss with each gulp. After more jokes told by the Ryn father of the group, and more drinks were passed around, Alara began to slip away into the comforts of being with her family once more, even if all of them weren't happy to see her.

~FIN

