**A Frosty Sithmas Eve**

*Submission for the fiction competition: "I'll Be Home For Sithmas"*

*Written and Submitted by Adapt Kamjin "Maverick" Lap'lamiz*

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 Sykes watched as his exhaled breath frosted in the air, lingering a moment before blowing off into the evening sky. It was his watch to oversee the Novitiates in their routine chores of maintaining the grounds of Adoniram Tower. Apprentice Djinn snapped another waste bag and nearly lost it as the breeze from Caelestis Port came howling in. He managed to catch it in time before it blew into a pile of hedge clippings Novice Thanatos was bundling. Sykes felt it before he saw it, turning towards the sky he saw snow begin to fall. Uhhh, looks like the beginning of a bad storm, he thought as thick, fluffy, flakes began to collect on his face. Pulling his hood up over his head, he turned to the crew, "Pick up the pace, or you'll be spending the night with bacta patches on your frozen digits." A collective sigh came from the Novitiates; they all knew he meant it.

 Visibility began to diminish as the storm picked up its intensity. While the wind gusted occasionally the snow fell with such density if you were to run through it, it gave the impression of being in hyperspace. Coming out of the distance, Novice Eilana carried several bags of refuse, though she seemed disquiet. She trudged up to Sykes, out of breath she whispered in his ear, "Master, there's something you should see." This peeked Sykes interest, what could be so interesting to see here in the heart of Caelestis City at the seat of Clan Scholae Palatinae's power. He was just about to dismiss her out of hand so they could finish up but something about her face gave him pause. "Okay, show me what is so urgent," he gruffed as they turned into another gust of snow.

 After walking a short ways, a faint, flickering light slowly became visible. Blinking his eyes against the frosted flakes falling in his face he thought he caught the outline of a dark figure standing near the flames. What sort of fool is out in this weather and, worse, who would be stupid enough to build an open fire within the compound, he thought to himself. "Finish up your duties, Eilana. I'll handle this." Eilana looked at him with apprehension in her eyes, "Are you sure you'll be alright?" Ah, how the untrained think, he chuckled to himself with the slightest flick of his wrist priming his concealed vibroblade, whatever this is; it's not going to be a match for a Battlemaster. "I'll be fine, Eilana, go finish up and then get inside."

 As she turned to leave him, he shouldered on against the increasingly frequent wind. He could clearly make out that someone had made a small bonfire in a clearing by the trees. The flames leapt into the sky, in a constant struggle with the snow as the wind caused it to dance nearly off the pile of leaves, twigs, and upon closer inspection what appeared to be several branches missing from one of the trees. His original guess was right, there was a figure standing nearby. They appeared to be wearing the dark black robes of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood with crimson accents. Their cloak's hood was up and covered all but their chin. If this was someone from a rival clan seeking to infiltrate their compound, they were doing a horrible job of staying inconspicuous.

 "Usually we keep the fires inside," he casually mentioned while far enough away not to be struck by any melee weapons they may be carrying. He approached slowly from the other side of the bonfire to try to see the individual's face when he failed to react to his statement. He might not be able to hear me over this storm, he reckoned, speaking louder, "We keep the fires inside!" The figure raised his head slightly this time, the light of the flames basking the figures face in a hellish orange-red glow.

 "I didn't feel like being around the festivities tonight, Sykes."

 "...Kamjin...Mav, is that you?" Sykes asked thinking he recognized the voice. The figure drew back his hood, confirming Sykes assumption. It was Kamjin, still known better by his call-sign Maverick when he was younger and still a TIE pilot. The snow started to accumulate on his slightly graying brown hair before melting from the heat of the bonfire and running down his face. His eyes seemed distance, as if while he acknowledged Sykes he was really seeing some place far away. Sykes had seen the look often on Seers but this seemed more haunted. Sykes had come to know Mav better since his return to Clan Scholae Palatinae. Before he had only known him as an Inquisitor within the Emperor's Hammer secretive High Court before the Exodus occurred. They had spared recently and... Well, best not to think of that mission just now, "What are you doing out here? Let's let this burn out and head back in from the storm."

 Kamjin did not react and returned to staring into the flames, lost somewhere a thousand parsecs away. His hair looked grayer now that more snow had fallen but the streams of the melting run-off gave, is he crying? It dawned on Sykes with a sharp realization that he was in fact crying. Though his body did not give it away, there were tears racing down his face, keeping pace with the melting snow. Sykes was at a loss for words and becoming increasingly uncomfortable. He would knife a person in the throat just as easily as he had spread jam on his bread but handling raw emotion was not something he was comfortable with. "Come on, Mav, I'm sure Shadow has one of those blasted Ewoks running around getting drinks," trying to coax him into the tower and to someone better equipped to handle an Elder who has gotten emotional.

 "You know, Sykes," Kamjin said, turning to face him, "It was just like tonight when I lost them." Whom could he have lost, he puzzled before Mav continued, "it was another Life Day...or, I guess you call it Sithmas now, when I lost Kya and the kids." Kya...who was, and then he made the connection, his wife!

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 Kamjin stared out the window as the blizzard continued unabated. As beautiful, as Hiran was during the temperature seasons it turned into a desolate frozen wasteland in the colder seasons. It was a testament to the quality of the construction crew's craftsmanship that the high spire that they called home did not buckle or waver under the onslaught of the storm. Turning away from the window, he was greeted with the warm, bubbling clamor of the Life Day party being setup. While he personally had never found a need to celebrate this holiday, this was shaping up to be enjoyable. Kya had convinced him that it would be good for the children and would give him an opportunity to further his business interests with the executives at The Credit Overload Casino.

 They had maintained the top few floors of one of the larger spires at The Credit Overload as a vacation spot during the beautiful tropical summers. Only the constant badgering from Kai and Komilia to see snow and Kya's gentle nudging did he finally relent. As a small army of servants and droids bustled around the room, he exhaled his nerves and took in the scene. Floating droids hung from the massive ceilings a web of sparkling icicles designed to look like frosted stars. Others wrapped the massive columns with colorful ribbons and more than could be told were putting up other festive plants and directions. Massive tables had been set up and most of their furniture had been relocated so that food stations could be set up. Already the smells of the various cooking stations were starting to mingle together. The spices hung heavily in the air and gave a pleasant aroma.

 He caught his eldest two children hiding behind one of the newly placed ferns. He watched with a fathering eye and Kai, nearly eight standard years now, scrunched up his face concentrating. With great effort, he extended his hand slightly and slowly bounced through the air, two of the candy treats through the air. His sister, Komilia, nearly five was jumping with glee as they came closer before bounding out and grabbing them both. Tossing one to Kai, she gobbled the other with the greedy joy of a child. Laughing they both sprinted off to find the next treat to steal or droid to annoy. As he watched them run off, he saw them sprint past Kya who was holding their newest baby, Hikaru, while their three-year-old Rohan was clutching to her gown.

 As she spun to yell at the eldest to behave, he took in the sight of the woman who had stolen his heart all those years ago. While she was Corellian, she had a graceful charm about her. You would never have known her humble upbringing by how seamlessly she interacted with this upper-class chaos. As he walked over to her, he took a moment to steal a bite of the roasted tip-yip. As he pushed the bite into his mouth, Kya smacked his hand. "That's for the guests," she admonished him with a stern but loving look.

 "Ow, that hurt," he mockingly shook his hand in feigned pain. It did nothing to change her expression. "Okay, fine. I won't eat until all the guests arrive." Finally, a smile returned to her face as she handed Hikaru to him. "Hold him for a minute," as she reached up and tugged on the collar of his dress uniform. "You really should lay off the treats too; you're starting to not fit this thing." To be fair, he had not worn this dress uniform in quite a while and it was a little snug. He made a note to speak with the quartermaster when he returned to the fleet.

 "You know, you're worse than my flight instructor with these orders Mrs. Lap'Lamiz," as he flashed that annoyingly sly smile of his. She rolled her eyes, used to this maneuver to deflect criticism. "Maybe if I was your flight instructor you'd have listened to me the first time." A butler came up and began asking Kamjin about the placement at the tables for certain dignitaries and business and how he wanted them arranged. "Have you given any more thought to what we talked about?" Kya tried to interject. "No, you can't place someone with suspected connections with the Hutt's next to the representative of the Corporate Divisions...umm, no dear, I didn't know there was anything left to discuss." Kya took Hikaru back from his arms, "There was, are you certain it's time for Kai to go to Eos? He's such a sweet boy and I don't think that place will be a good fit for him."

 At this, Kamjin dismissed the butler, "We've been through this a dozen times. He is a sweet boy and he will still excel at Eos for his training. You've seen the havoc he can cause throughout the house when he has a tantrum. It's either he begins his training or we concussion foam the tower," while he said it lightly he was exasperated at the continued discussion. It was past time for Kai to head to Eos to begin his training at the Shadow Academy. Yes, he was young, but he was strong in the Force. "It's for the best and he'll begin to make friends and establish himself for when Komilia and ultimately Rohan and Hikaru follow him."

 Kya pressed her point, throwing caution to the wind, "Your Clan isn't even there anymore. They're off somewhere..." she knew she had crossed a line as his eyes flared briefly into those horrific yellow/red Sith eyes of his. It passed as quickly as it had come across him and if it had been anyone other than her they might not have noticed. "I know Palatinae is gone, but he still has to be trained," a strained controlled smoothness was in his voice. She sighed and looked down dejected. "Then you have to be the one to tell him tomorrow that he won't return to his friends at the academy."

 "I will, I'll make him understand," he kissed her exposed forehead. Savoring her sweet scent and the elegant hairstyle, she put her long auburn locks in for the party. "We'll talk more after the party. I promise." As he walked away, she raised her head, blinking back the moistness in her eyes, and walked off to see to the arrangements.

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 The room was raucous with dignitaries, corporate representatives, military officers, and assorted well-wishers filling the multi-tiered grand room of the Lap'lamiz's spire. Kamjin weaved effortless from one conversation to another, as one would expect from a former Executive Officer. A smile and pat on the shoulder with one Twi'lek followed by a firm handshake with a Devaronian and a promise to come back and discuss a hunting trip. A few moments spent waving his hands through the air recounting a particularly cunning battle where he navigated a debris field with his TIE Praetor before catching a group of rebels unaware.

 Kya watched with the awe she had of him when she had first met him. For someone who had spent time in Praetorian Squadron and the Dark Jedi Brotherhood doing who knows what to uphold the spirit of the Empire he could appear as such a strikingly charming individual. It's what had led her to fall in love with him, to choose to start a family with him, and she knew he would never change that smug, cute, grinning smile going through life.

 Sighing, at the man she had fallen in love with and the quandary that he is, as she turned to go check on the children that she had sent to bed shortly after the party had started and Kamjin had introduced them beamingly to all the important people coming to the party.

 Kamjin made his way into the center of the room and picking up a spoon and a flute of Daruvvian champagne from a passing servant droid he gently tapped the rim. As the heavenly ting of high-end crystal echoed through the room, the various attendees turned to face him.

 "To our esteemed hosts, the board of The Credit Overload thank you for your hospitality. I encourage you all to take part in the various games through the island; though more importantly the ones within this spire," and then muttering a joke, "because I get a cut that pays for all of this." The crowd cheered in applause and laughter. "I am so pleased to see so many of you here to celebrate this most joyous of Life Days!" As the words came out of his mouth, the room exploded.

 The strings of lights hung with care throughout the room exploded in a cascading fury sending plaster and durasteel frameworks tumbling down upon the revelers. Kamjin was thrown to the floor, fiery embers scorched his dress uniform, burning hole down to his skin. As the embers reached his skin, he jumped up startled. Flames had already spread across the ribbons and other decorations. Dark, billowing smoke was filling the room and burned his eyes...no, something was in the smoke that was causing his eyes to water. The one joyous sounds of celebration had turned to anguish as blooded partygoers tried to flee or pull loved ones from the crushing rumble that was still falling as secondary explosions rocked the spire. As he started to regain his balance, he started choking on the smoke. Grasping at his collar, he ripped it open and the first several buttons of his jacket. His chest heaved trying to fill his lungs.

 As he started to center himself to focus on gaining control the windows were blown inward. As the gale force blizzard came in at the same time as the shards of glass, he was knocked again on his rear. Picking his head back up he saw blackened figures landing through the opening on jet packs. Before they had even hit the ground blaster fire lit up the room. The guests were sluggish to respond to this new threat and quite a few were mowed down in the first barrage of blaster fire. Why did he listen to Kya and not bring in the Imperial Sovereign Protectors to guard the party, yes they'd have intimidated the guests and would have slowed the evening down but not having them here was proving fatal. As one of the figures approached him, he threw out his hands and hurled him through the air into the ceiling. His body armor cracked and splintered seconds before his jet pack exploded.

 Reacting quickly now he was on his feet, reaching down to his hip, and finding he had left his lightsaber in his room. Another concession he had with Kya. She said it hurt when she would wrap her arms around his waist as they danced closely to those old Alderaanian songs he loved. Finding his ceremonial dagger from his Grand Order of the Emperor, he drew the line blade and squaring himself into his fighting stance he lunged at the next attacker. The blade shatters upon contact with the plasteel armor. Cursing to himself that a ceremonial dagger would naturally be just that, ceremonial and non-functional he took the broken blade and jammed it under the helmet links, sending the attacker to the ground clutching at his throat.

 The children! He had to get to the children and Kya and get out of this situation. Reaching out towards their rooms, he sensed only emptiness. Oh no, did they come after my family! Spreading out his thoughts, he found them. They were heading to the roof and thank the Force, Kya was with them. Several of the guests rushed past him screaming for the turbolift. Kamjin shoved them out of the way and headed there himself. As several of the attackers formed up his exploded lighting from his fingers lifting them off their feet and scrambling through the air and out the window, the lightning cascading over their armor as they fell looking like the icicle lights that hung there moments earlier. Reaching the lift, he slammed the button for the roof.

 The seconds it took for the lift to reach the roof were the longest in his life. The dark energies raged with him, his eyes reddened by the smoke now simmered with the yellow/red hue of the Sith. He couldn't comprehend what had happened. Who would attack him here, a rival casino, perhaps one of the Rodian casinos who felt excluded by the Hirani's island wide complex? He hacked up phlegm from his lungs, recognizing for a moment just how much damage that smoke had done. He tried to center himself but there wasn't time. The doors parted and he was assaulted with the full force of the storm. In the distance, lighting struck illuminating the night sky. Across the roof, he saw a transport ship hovering just off the edge of the spire. Relief spread through his body, Kya had called security and had a rescue ship here already for the family. He fought to bring a smile to his face as her blurrily saw figures helping his children on to ship as Kya shouted instructions to them. He shot the flash of light but it took a moment before it registered that he had been shot in the shoulder. The scent of burnt skin was lost to the wind.

 "Kya, get away from there!" he howled over the storm praying that she would hear him. Reaching out with his other arm he sent a wave of lighting coursing through the sky striking the figure that had shot him. As he screamed and fell from the ship, he finally saw that it was Kya who was holding the blaster.

 "Daddy!" Komilia screamed as another figure held her by the arms and dragged her up into the ship.

 "What is happening, Kya!"

 "We're leaving. I will not let you force myself children down the path of the Dark Side," her gown had been ripped up to the thigh to allow her a pistoleer's stance. Whether it was snow on her face or tears, he would never know. "I love you, we can talk about this!" he pleaded.

 "The time for talk is over. I lost myself in you. I lost myself from my assignment. I made excuses and rationalized what was happening. The New Republic was becoming just as corrupt as the Old and we were far from the Galactic Core and you were loving and sweet." She was hysterical. Her once well-sculpted hair blew wildly in the wind. "I never should have gotten close to you but I did and now it is time to go."

 "Kya," choking on the pain, "I always knew you were part of the New Republic counterintelligence. I didn't care. I love you!"

 "I love you too!" as their heartbroken words mingled in the storm, "but I love my kids more." She stepped back onto the boarding ramp and with her other hand triggered the remote that set off the thermodetonators under the roof. As he was thrown into the night sky, he watched his wife and kids disappear into the storm and from his life.

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 Sykes looked at Kamjin with a new sense of awe, after a while he asked, "How did you survive?" Kamjin continued to stare into the fire, having never broken his thousand-parsec gaze into the past. "The blizzard on Hiran had been going strong for a couple months at this point. I hit a rather large snow bank. The rescue crews found me towards the morning and I spent a month in a bacta tank."

 Before Sykes could think better of it he asked, "Did you ever find them?" At this, he did turn and faced him. "No." The word hung heavy in the glow of the fire. Sykes looked into the flames himself at this point and saw the image of his wife, her mind twisted by Arcona, as he struck her down. Without another word, he came to stand next to Kamjin, extending his hands to warm them by the fire and there they stayed through that evening; keeping Sithmas in a way only, those who had suffered terrible loss could.

Submitted by:

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ED / SB / GC / SCx2 / ACx2 / DCx4 / Cr:2R / PoBx7 / CFx3 / LS / SoL

{SA: MVS - DPCM - DPCP - DPE}