**The True Story of Sithmas**

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

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

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             "Apprentice Shadow!!" Robin Hawk's voice boomed across the training room. A young girl hurriedly stepped out of the ranks and ran forward. Shadow's white apprentice robes rustled as she moved while the tips of her ears twitched uncontrollably at her nervousness for being called forward in front of the whole assembly. Coming to a stop in front of Robin her golden eyes looked downwards at her feet in subservience to Robin's authority. She hummed to herself, as she looked her over. As the pause continued, Shadow brushed her hair back behind her ear. "Don't do that!" Robin snapped annoyed at Shadow's fidgeting. Looking at her data pad, "Apprentice, we're still settling into our new compound. Several transports were unloaded in the hanger bay that needs to be organized for intake and distribution to their appropriate areas."

             Shadow raised her eyes in shock; she had spent yesterday watching the dozens of transports land in the compound. "Mistress, that could take days," she stammered before Robin cut her off. "With your abilities I expect it'll take weeks," she scowled down at her. When Shadow did not immediately move off to her assignment, Robin howled, "Go!" Shadow bowed and rushed off in the direction of the hangers.

             *She is such a witch and not the powerful mystical Dathomir witches but rather an ugly demanding horrible woman.* She looked up into the sky and heard the telltale whine of more transport engines arriving in the courtyard. She felt horribly dejected. She had wanted to finish some of her course work and Kazumi had told her there was a wonderful new Mon Cal restaurant down by the port that they should try out. Her ears twitched again and then dropped when she rounded the corner to see the active hanger bay. As the latest transports spun around to land large server droids were unloading massive boxes from those already on the ground. *Weeks...this'll take years!* she thought to herself.

             "Are you the apprentice in charge?" the dock master asked as she entered under the hanger doors. Stammering, she replied, "..uhh, ya. I mean, yes, I am in charge." The dock master looked her over and laughed. "Okay, well good luck with it all," he said, handing her the data pad. In a flurry of keystrokes the dock master started walking Shadow through how to control the server droids, "...and this enters the manifest from the ship into the local servers..." her head was swimming, "...don't press this button unless you've completed section 205.3.a(2).n otherwise you'll cause a server wipe..." S*ection 205.3.a(...what was that last...*she went to have him repeat what he had said but he was already walking off to one of the grounds crewmen providing traffic control for a landing transport. *I am never going to get out of here...*she sighed to herself as she took the data pad and walked over to the first pile of crates.

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             The sun had set hours ago and it looked like no progress had been made at all. Shadow hadn't eaten at all that day, not after Robin had stopped by and chastised her lack of progress by midday. *She really thought I'd have finished half of these transports by midday, that lady has no clue what is involved with this process* and Shadow knew that now. If she had felt Robin's lashing had been horrible, the Dock Master has been even worse. She had to start completely over at least three times before he felt satisfied to go about his business again. *I am so hungry...*she hadn't eaten all day and she was starting to find her mind wandering while her stomach grumbled.

             Keying in the next sequence the server droid went to grab the crate off the pallet and missed. Shadow quickly looked down at the pad and saw she entered the command wrong. The droid's forklift crashed through the crate a foot above the bottom. Lifting up it tore the box to pieces. Shadow rapidly punched at the pad to get it to stop to no avail. As the droid spun to begin carrying the crate, the contents spilled all over the hanger floor. Shadow finally got the correct command entered and the droid froze in place. Shadow fell to her knees and screamed! Even though the hanger was still active with technicians, no one bothered to look at her. This was not the first time she had screamed in frustration. *I'll never get this done. These blasted droids are horrible. You have to be a slicer to operate these things. There has to be an easier way to do this...something living that could take commands. When I'm making the decisions there will not be droids for this. Maybe something cute, like a Ewok. Yes, she thought...Ewoks would make excellent workers.*

             For a moment, she chuckled at her idea and then the sound of the contents of the crate clattering to the ground brought her back up quickly to reality. She looked down and saw a small holoprojector had skidded to a stop near her foot. She didn't know why but she reached down and picked it up. Looking at it there was no ID tag assigned to it. Checking the manifest there was nothing indicating who owned the holoprojecter. Something drew her to this item and she tucked it into the pocket of her robe. She called over to another server droid to bring a new crate to collect the remaining items.

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             It was well into the night before Shadow felt brave enough, and tired enough, to slip back into her quarters. Robin would scream at her again in the morning regardless of what she did. As she slipped out of her robe and into her nightwear, she found the holoprojector still in her robe. She had completely forgotten about it. She fingered it gently, spinning it over and over as she sat down on her cot. *What is it about you little friend that made me take you*, she thought. As she continued to spin it her finger brushed the activation pad spooking her, she dropped it on the floor. As it spun the hologram spun slowly to an upright projection. Shadow looked closely as the bluish hued figures.

             "Come on, Kelvis, keep up...are you recording this?" The voice was coming from a non-descript TIE Pilot. It was clearly a strong man, though not overly tall. He beckoned who must have been Kelvis who was recording to keep up. Shadow was enthralled but couldn't explain why. "Nedjaa, do you have the stuff?" the first pilot asked and another nodded and showed him something in a duffel bag. "Good, keep up guys and stay quiet." Shadow was starting to make out more of where they were, it looked like a hanger of some sort as she caught the wings of TIE Interceptors docked. "There it is, Wrath's ship," Shadow knew that name from somewhere but couldn't place it immediately as she watched them pull out what appeared to be spray paint cans. They snuck up on a class of starfighter that she didn't recognize. It looked like a TIE Advance but the viewport was crimson red. The pilot, must have been Kelvis, dropped the holorecorder and joined in. For a while all she could see were their boots and their laughter. After a while the recording rocked as the recorder was picked back up and she saw that the solar panels had been painted with...were those life day orbs?

             The recording started shaking as they began running out of the hanger guffawing, "Happy Sithmas!"

             The recording ended. Shadow looked at it for a while and was too tired to check if there was another recording on the holoprojecter. Laying her head down she immediately started falling to sleep. *What in the galaxy...is Sithmas?*

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             The next few days continued in much the same way. Robin called Shadow up from the morning roll call, berated her lack of progress, and then sent her back to the hangers. Towards the middle of the day, Kazumi stopped over to brighten her day. "You really drew the short end of the shoto, didn't you Shadow?" she quipped, leaning against a stack of crates that easily were easily five meters tall. "Oh, ha-ha," Shadow sarcastically retorted, "Like you're doing any better with all the grounds keeping they've been making you do?"

             "Better than doing this," she chuckled, "At least I'm doing something physical. That's got to help me gain power and connection to the Force."

             Shadow swiped her two right fingers across her chest and watched as Kazumi's feet went sliding out from underneath her. "Oh of course, you've become sooo strong with the Force." As she looked up from the ground, they both shared a deep laugh. As she brushed herself off something again came over Shadow. "Hey, come take a look at this for a minute," as she withdrew from her pocket the holoprojector. Keying the activation pad again she showed her what she had watched earlier in the week.

             "This is hilarious...but what is Sithmas?" she asked?

             "I don't know, I've never heard of it before"

             "Is there any more of these on here?"

             "I don't know," and she pressed the corresponding button. A new image sprang from the device. This time there was a close-up of a charming young man. Shadow blushed at his striking good looks. "Guardian Squadron, this may be our greatest challenge yet. You've all be training for this! Yes, most of you are Guardians and Apprentices but the Dark Side is strong with you. I know each of you will do your duty and serve us well!" the recorder panned at and whoever it was appeared to be wearing the old robes of a Sith Warrior. He began charging up and snow covered hill and shouted, "For Sithmas!!!" and then there were...snowballs? There appeared to be a massive snowball fight occurring across a snowy field. As the recorder ducked and weaved, snowballs flew through the air. Whoever was the one who spoke stopped short as several older men gained up on him and pushing out their arms a huge wave of snow sprang up and covered him completely. The recorder fell to the ground convulsing in laughter and then it went dark.

             "That looked like fun," Kazumi looked at Shadow, "We should show Evant."

             Shadow started to nod and then, hearing Robin yelling for her from the other side of the hanger, pushed Kazumi to leave and went back to her data pad.

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             Evant crossed his legs in the common room intrigued by what Shadow and Kazumi had just shown him. "I've never heard of Sithmas," he exclaimed as he stroked his chin. "It definitely shared some things in common with Life Day but it clearly has a more prankish nature to it. Is it only the two recordings on the projector?" he asked looking at both Kazumi and Shadow.

             "I don't know," Shadow was eager to see if there was more. She keyed in the holoprojector to see if there was another one.

             A new image came into focus, another young man, though not as cute as the one from the second holo, with a messy mop of hair. "Okay, we're going to have to be quick and get in and get out." he said into the recorder. "I'm right behind you Gibbs, as soon as you open the door I'll let it go," the second voice sounded a lot like the person from the last recording. They all watched as the one called Gibbs snuck forward and reached for the controls to the showers; pressing down the doors swooshed open as a cloud of steam escaped. "Merry Sithmas!" the other voice screamed and suddenly what looked like Life Day orbs were hurled into the room. As they shattered against the walls and people, sticky goo splattered out. As people started to react pulling at the sticky multi-colored substance they started to scream at the two individuals. Gibbs slammed shut the door controls and locked them. The recording shook as the two started running off before derezzing again.

             Evant looked at the two of them, "So...we can start to conclude that Sithmas occurs at the same time as Life Day; judging by the prank in the first one and the Life Day orbs thrown in the third vid," Evant looked deep in thought. "There's festive activities such as the snowball fight but also a good deal of pranks that occur," his face puzzled up for a moment, "or at least a few of them decided to pull pranks. That may not actually be part of the tradition."

             Without prompting this time, Shadow thumbed forward to see if another video was on the projector. A new image came up and a long table had been set. There was tip-yip and a wide assortment of roast meats, vegetables, and sweets. Down the row there were several Brotherhood members based upon their robes. At the head of the table the man from the second video was standing, looking slightly older than before but still with a mesmerizing charm, Shadow reflected. "My fellow Sith, as we look at our great conquests, the raising of our house to a Clan and the foundation of House Acclivis Draco, each of you have fulfilled all the duties placed before you with excellence. Let us then, celebrate this," and the man chuckled, "Sithmas." The people around the table slapped the table and roared.

             Shadow looked at the two of them, "I like this Sithmas...and I think I have an idea. Evant do you still have access to a shuttle?"

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             Robin ran her hand through her hair. *These apprentices are driving me crazy. They can't do anything right and there's no way we'll get everything settled away before the Clan leadership arrives.* Her voice was hoarse from all the screaming and she knew tomorrow the beatings would have to begin. *You just can't find people who are motivated to do the job the right way,* naturally meaning her way, *the first time.* As she walked down the corridors, oblivious to how people who spotted her quickly turned and found different avenues to walk down, her mind continued to swirl with thoughts of how she would torment her apprentices into becoming as great, or rather nearly as great, as she is. Coming up to her quarters, she sighed again, *It'll all be worth it when*. She never finished her thought as soon as he depressed the door activation panel and wall of snow tumbled out of the door. The force of it knocked her back, hitting her head hard on the floor. As she slowly lost consciousness and the snow continued to cover her body she thought she heard several voices scream out "Merry Sithmas!" *What the Sith is Sithmas* were her final thoughts before blackness engulfed her.

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             Sprinting down the corridors Shadow, Evant, and Kazumi struggled to breathe through all their laughter. Rounding another corner that pressed their backs up against the wall, their chests heaving, and they listened. For a few seconds there was nothing. In unison, they peered around the corner and felt the wave of energy that exploded and the blood-curdling screech as Robin regained consciousness. They collapsed to the floor, rolling in laughter, clutching their stomachs as they cramped from the gut clenching release of their emotions after having been tormented for so long.

             As several people rushed passed them to head to the explosion and the alarms started to sound they regained their composure and stealthily fell into the shadows and disappeared back to their assigned duties.

             Later that evening, in the mess hall, they gathered around a table. The food was not special, rather non-descript rations as the compound was still not fully operational, yet to them; it was a feast. They had never tasted food so good and would claim to never taste food quite as good either. Not a word was said between them about the day's events. As they spooned their rations into their mouths, they each looked at the other in the eyes, giving each other a knowing wink they blurted out together, "Let's do this again next Sithmas!"

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             Shadow stood on the balcony of Adoniram Tower and noticed the snow was starting to fall. It was a pleasant feeling and fitting for this Sithmas's celebration. Behind her, the large banquet hall was in full Sithmas swing. Lights twinkled, floating decorations bounced through the air, and hundreds of Clan Scholae Palatine members were reveling in the holiday. *Look at how happy they are, this truly has grown into something more than it began as* she thought. Watching one particularly drunk Dark Jedi try to perform a tumbling trick and crashing into a table of sweets she snorted, before catching herself. She was the Consul now; she had to be somewhat more composed. *I wish Kazumi were here to see what this has grown into. He probably would have kept more of the prankish nature of this holiday going strong.*

             As she looked out across the compound and wondered how long Sykes was planning to keep the Novitiates out working before allowing them to come in for the celebration. As she reached out to get a sense of Sykes mind, she felt something...something she hadn't felt for many years. Looking over to her right she saw the twinkling of a small light slowly growing stronger. As it dawned on her, she turned and walked back through the party towards her room; taking a considerably slower time than she'd have liked as more than one person stopped to wish her a Merry Sithmas, toast her health, or otherwise grab a moment of her time.

             After great effort, and more than one promise to come back for another toast, she exited the tower. Pulling her hood up over her head, she walked out into the increasing storm. She knew the general direction she needed to head and the snow stung her eyes; yet she caught the light ahead of her and pressed on. As she grew nearer, she saw two figures standing by a roaring bonfire, one reaching out to warm his hands. Sliding in next to them, she looked up into the faces of Kamjin Lap'lamiz and Sykes Jade.

             "Evening guys, mind if I join you?" she asked cautiously sensing that something had been exchanged between the two. When neither acknowledged her, she took a step closer to the fire. Reaching into her cloak she withdrew an old holoprojecter, dented and worn with age. She effortlessly thumbed it to the second recording and the young man's face shimmered in the air, this time with a purplish haze as the fire distorted the image. As the figure began again, "Guardian Squadron, this may be our greatest challenge yet..." an imperceptible tightening in Kamjin's eyes occurred.

             "This is you, isn't it?" Shadow asked, looking at Kamjin's face. He reached out his hand and took the holoprojecter from her. As Shadow looked, the young charming face was mirrored now in the older man's face. She watched as the youthful image ran through his eyes, hurling snow balls before finally being knocked down. As the holoprojector deactivated, he lowered his hand to his side and turned his head towards her. "Where did you find this?"

             Shadow launched into an animated retelling of how she found the holoprojector, sharing it with her friends, the prank they pulled on Robin, and how slowly over the years, it grew into the huge festival being celebrated today. Kamjin stood there, unmoving, as she gestured and pantomimed the events. Out of breath, she grabbed onto his arm, giving a slight tug, "Come on, we have to share this with everyone, they'll love to hear you tell more stories of what you guys did," beaming with the same youthful energy she had when she first discovered Sithmas. Sykes leaned forward and catching her eye slowly shook his head *no*. She looked back at Kamjin and the somber mood hit her and with a touch of insight she released his arm, joining them in their circle and began to warm her hands.

             "Merry Sithmas you two," she said quietly as the wind carried her words off into the night and there they stood, in subdued silence, celebrating Sithmas Eve night.