

Celebration

Submission for the fiction competition: "The Day Of"

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Duk was frustrated. His lekku twitched as he paced back and forth at the landing pad in Caelestis Spaceport. The Lambda-class shuttle was prepped and maintenance crews were removing the fuel lines as their departure time had passed. *Where is Kamjin?* He was supposed to meet him here at oh-eight-hundred hours to take the shuttle to Judecca Station for the award ceremony. Duk, despite having been freed from slavery in his teenage years, still struggled with trust and having his Master being late was sending his anxiety into overdrive.

"Sir, are you ready to launch?" the pilot asked over the comlink. Duk looked up and could see the helmetless pilot looking down impatiently.

"We need to wait for my Master. He'll be here momentarily, I'm sure."

Is this a test? Am I supposed to make a decision in his absence and perhaps continue on to the ceremony? He stopped pacing, and cupped his chin. His orange eyes squinting in thought until only the red iris was visible. *No, this can't be a test. It's an award ceremony. We're leaving our capital city on a trip to the main station of the fleet. There's no danger here...right?* In the days leading up to today he had a vague sense of something intangible. He figured it was just nerves at attending his first award ceremony where the Summit leadership team would be present. Sure, Kamjin was an Elder member of the Brotherhood but he wasn't currently a leader and, as such, more approachable than Shadow or Mauro.

"Kid, if he's not here yet we have to go to make our departure window." the shuttle pilot's annoyed voice filled his comlink again.

He shuddered at being called 'kid'. Not because he was young or upset about not being recognized as the mid-twenty year old he was. It brought back memories of being looked down upon and seen as nothing more than a mindless beast to be used and abused. Putting his hand out he concentrated upon the pilot for a few moments before he was pushed back into his seat.

"If my Master is not present we will not be going anywhere." His rage was beginning to build upon him. Why did people continue to push him? His focus narrowed, seeing only the now struggling pilot fighting against his control.

Suddenly, a hand was upon his shoulder. Kamjin, dressed in his formal elder robes, had a casual yet firm look upon his face. "Come on, Duk." his voice was lacking its usual lighthearted charm. As his hand fell away, Duk lowered his head. Lowering his head, Duk felt both relief that his Master had arrived and also shame that he hadn't handled the situation appropriately. As he walked towards the shuttle he saw the boarding ramp start to rise.

"Hey, wait!" he yelled looking up at the pilot and saw his eagerness to lift off and be rid of the Sith. Then, wheeling around, he looked at Kamjin. Kamjin had his arm up in the air giving a circular motion signalling the pilot to lift off. Duk didn't understand.

"Master..." he began before getting cut off.

"We're not going on the shuttle." As the shuttle pressured and retracted its landing gear Kamjin turned and began walking off towards the outer hangars.

We're not going on the shuttle? Duk rapidly tried to process what was happening. Why wouldn't we go on the shuttle? Is there a different shuttle for an Adept? I had double checked everything and this should have been the right flight for us to take.

Coming out of his introspection, Duk saw that Kamjin had widened the gap between them. Duk rushed back to Kamjin's side. "Master, if we're not taking the shuttle where are we going?"

"We have an appointment to keep before we head to the station," Kamjin replied and noticing the concerned look upon his apprentice's face added, "Don't worry, we'll make it in time for the ceremony. You won't get a demerit if you're late you know." Kamjin chuckled to himself at his joke. Duk felt more at ease but had no greater understanding of what was going on. Looking around he noticed that they were heading into one of the hangars that housed their TIE Fighters. As they neared the massive open hanger doors Duk took in the sight of multiple rows of polished TIE Fighters hanging from the ceiling. Upon the hangar floor several ships were in various states of disassembly. As they entered he looked up at the height of the TIE's solar panels for the one resting on a lower level landing strut. Blinking his eyes, they adjusted to the darkened hangar and noticed a small crowd near the back around one of the disassembled TIEs. *No, not disassembled*, he thought, *destroyed*. The TIE's rounded cockpit rested upon the hangar floor. Its hexagonal solar panels were askew, resting on the floor and support brackets coming off the TIE. Its usual Imperial blue hull was blackened with blast marks and the cracked cockpit viewport obscured the burnt remains of the controls and seat.

"Master, what happened?"

Kamjin didn't respond but rather wrapped his cloak tighter around his body, concealing his robe as he sought to join the gathering of other cloaked individuals. Duk looked around and began recognizing these men as other members of Clan Scholae Palatinae. The bandaged human was Ellac, still recovering from his battle with several Rancors. Next to him was his Master, Sykes, who was stroking his goatee while his index finger traced the scar that ran along his jawline. There was Kah'ri Marru and his Master Raiden. Both looked as if they had returned from off-world with their tanned skin standing in contrast with the others. The other human male Duk didn't recognize at all.

Duk's lekku twitched as he realized he was the only non-human amongst the gathering. Kamjin, greeted each with a firm handshake. Grasping each in turn and greeting them by name. The one that Duk had not known was apparently Talon Jade and was somehow related to Sykes. Watching the exchange, Duk noted that Ellac had the barest flinch when Kamjin grasped his hand. Almost as if he feared that something was going to happen to him.

"Who has it?" Kamjin asked the crowd.

Have what? What is going? Duk was growing increasingly confused by the whole affair. Looking around he noticed that the other apprentices had similar looks of confusion.

"I do, Mav," Talon responded. Reaching into his cloak he withdrew a bottle of Kowakian rum and handed it to Kamjin, having referred to him by his old callsign.

Taking the bottle from Talon, Kamjin inspected it and nodded in approval. "Talon, you always manage to get the good stuff. Where did you get your hands on this?"

Talon shrugged, "Do you really want to hear the story now?"

"No, tell me later."

Kamjin took his other hand and held it flat on the neck of the bottle, slowly moving it upwards uncorking the bottle in a minor bit of showboating with the Force. Regrasping the bottle by its now exposed neck, Kamjin held it out in front of him.

“For many of you, this is your first time. For the others, this is an old tradition,” Kamjin began as everyone turned to focus on him. “Today, we celebrate the successes of our Clan. Some of you here today will soon be recognized for those accomplishments. But for some of our Clan, there will be no award ceremony.” In unison they all turned to look at the remains of the TIE. “For some, their days of glory are over. Their accomplishments now lost to the ages. We, the lucky few, who remain now carry them forward for the ages.” As he finished his toast he took a healthy glug from the bottle. Wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his robe he passed the bottle to Duk. As Duk hesitated Kamjin gave the bottle a slight tilt. Duk, catching on, took the bottle and drank. His mouth was overtaken by the sweet syrupy taste. As he passed the bottle on down the line, his head began to swim. *Just how much alcohol is in that stuff?* As he regained control of himself, he noticed that the bottle had made its way back to Talon who, after taking his shallow, poured the remainder of the bottle out over the TIE cockpit.

After a moment of silence, the group began to disperse. As Duk watched them leave he saw in the growing sunlight outside the hangar, a troop transport settling on the ground. *Of course, they’d have their own means of getting to the celebration.*

As Duk turned to head to the ship, Kamjin stopped him. “You know why we do this, right?”

Duk looked back, having known this lesson from an early day as a slave. “Yes, because this is the end for all of us and no one will remember the medals we receive. This is the real reward we all seek, to be remembered.”

Kamjin nodded in approval and reaching into his cloak pulled out another bottle of Kowakian rum. When Duk’s face showed his surprise, Kamjin laughed. “Duk, who do you think Talon got the bottle from?” Uncorking it, Kamjin took a swig and handed it to Duk who drank deeply as well as they went to rejoin the others. Passing the bottle through the flight and telling tales of friends long gone.

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“It was a beautiful ceremony, Shadow,” Mauro offered as they left the podium and headed out of the assembly area.

“It was,” Shadow replied and scrunched her face, “but do you think some of them were intoxicated? Several of them looked like they could barely stand-up.”