

New Directions to a Familiar Place

Submission for the fiction competition: "[CSP] TRF Aftermath"
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"Sir, there's no trace of the ship that blasted past our blockade," the trooper said but Kamjin wasn't listening. *My sons, they were here*, he thought. *How could I have not sensed them sooner*. Though he had sensed them without recognizing them. A decade apart clearly had strained his connection to his children. It wasn't until he heard the straining sound of the AT-AT's lumbering up to the platform that he snapped back to reality.

"You're dismissed," he said to the trooper. As the trooper saluted and left, Kamjin surveyed the aftermath of the battle. It had been a conclusive victory. Lanis had been captured and his Wards were defeated. What remained was subjugating the population. His cloak whipped in the wind as he looked over the edge of the deployed AT-AT docking platform. Beneath him he saw the procession of the captured population being led in shackles towards the platform. *This is my reward for my circumvention of Shadow*, he thought as the AT-AT lumbered into position. As the docking clamps engaged an officer emerged with a manifest.

"Kamjin?" he inquired following a quick salute.

"Yes, Commander," Kamjin replied. The exhaustion straining his voice.

"We've just been added to the rotation," he extended a datapad to Kamjin. "This should accelerate the processing of the prisoners. We now project to be completed in three days instead of five."

Kamjin rubbed his eyes as he focused on the new schedule. "What's this new line item?" he asked.

The officer looked at the datapad and pulled up the details on the task. "Oh, we've allocated a break period to allow the prisoners to eat."

Kamjin looked back at the prisoners who not so long ago were fanatically fighting to kill them over such a foolish misunderstanding. His face contorted into a scowl before turning back to the officer. "Remove the line item and accelerate the activity to complete in two days."

The officer looked aghast for a moment before seeing the yellowish tinge start to appear in Kamjin's eyes. He gained control of his reaction and saluted. "Yes sir, we'll complete the activity in two days." Kamjin entered his authorization code for the new orders and returned the datapad to the Commander.

As the officer accepted the datapad the stormtroopers began marching the line of prisoners towards the AT-AT. None of the prisoners looked up as they shuffled in line towards the awaiting AT-AT. Kamjin savored the fear as they did not know where they were going or what was going to happen to them. Even Kamjin didn't know their final destination; nor did he care. His thoughts were cast towards the stars and where he sons had fled to and whether his wife was with them. It was then that it dawned upon him, *where was Komilia?*

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It had been a grueling two days but the last of the prisoners were boarding the final AT-AT. Kamjin had not left the platform in that time and the bags under his eyes showed it. He reached up and scratched the stubble that had grown on his chin and yawned. A woman prisoner glared at him as she spit at his boots.

"You monster! Are we boring you with our torment?" she screeched.

Kamjin moved his foot without bothering to look. The spit missed by mere millimeters. As he yawned again he replied, "Yes, you are." He gestured to a trooper who put the butt of his rifle into her stomach. As she doubled over the trooper dragged her out of line into the AT-AT.

Climbing up from the stairwell, Kamjin's apprentice, Duk, appeared. The younger Togruta witnessed the trooper's handling of the prisoner and he instantly knew Kamjin was in a mood. He swallowed hard as his lekku began to twitch. As he approached his Master he bowed.

"Rise, Apprentice," Kamjin said. "You did well driving the prisoners forward. Did you have much trouble keeping them in line?"

Duk smiled, remembering some particular moments of expressing himself upon the prisoners to ensure they were motivated. "Nothing to report," Duk responded.

"Good, then it's time to get off this rock," Kamjin said and he turned to head for the stairwell.

"Actually," Duk hesitated. "That's why I'm here. Shadow wants you to report to her at the forward command station."

Kamjin turned back to look at Duk. The swirling emotions within his eyes made Duk avert his gaze. At last Kamjin let out a sigh. "I assume you have the speeders waiting below?"

Duk nodded in confirmation. Kamjin motioned for Duk to lead the way. As they climbed down from the platform he pondered what new menial task Shadow had in mind to remind him that she was in charge of the Clan. He had to admit he was impressed by the way she was handling the situation. She could have easily lashed out and struck at him. Instead, she belittled him with work beneath his abilities. The troopers would have a fine laugh at his expense and she'd strengthen her position. An expert move that he appreciated.

As they reached the bottom of the platform two military speeder bikes hovered waiting for them. Kamjin mounted the nearest one. Grasping the handles he throttled the accelerator and sped off into the city. Kamjin skillfully navigated the wreckage of the cityscape. It was the first time in days he'd left the platform and he wanted to blow off some steam before meeting with Shadow. He gunned it and jumped over the wrecked wing of a starship before skidding the speeder around to slide into a large pipe that had fallen from a skyscraper. Duk took a more cautious approach as he watched his Master show off. *He's definitely in a mood*, Duk thought. *I haven't seen him this brazen in a while. What has gotten into him?*

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"Empress, we've spotted Kamjin and his Apprentice," the guardsmen announced. Shadow finished giving instructions to Duk before descending from the observation post by the forward command station. She exhaled slowly, preparing herself for this meeting. As Kamjin and his apprentice approached from where they had parked their speeders she smiled inwardly. *He looks a bit haggard*, she thought. *Perhaps his time spent on prisoner detail has reminded him as to his place.* But that thought gave her cold comfort knowing what she was about to do.

"You summoned me, Empress?" Kamjin asked bowing.

"Arise, Kamjin," Shadow responded. Turning to Duk she commanded, "Leave us." Duk looked at Kamjin who gave an almost imperceptible nod. Duk then bowed and left to wait by the speeders. "I saw the report that the last of the prisoners were transferred today. Were you eager to be done with your assignment?"

"There was a more efficient means of accomplishing the task." Kamjin replied. Shadow nodded and began to walk along what had once been a beautiful park in the heart of the city. In kinder times the scenery would have been majestic. Now it was ruinous with the husks of burnt trees littering the ground. The paved sidewalk cracked and upturned. The once pristine creek littered with debris and oil slicks.

"More efficient, indeed. I trust you've taken to heart the intention of the assignment?" Shadow asked.

Kamjin tried to smirk and ended up yawning. "Yes," the reply was drawn out. "Masterfully done, Shadow. Though, to be clear, I would make the same choice again in the future."

"Oh, I have no doubt that you would. One day your arrogance is going to be the end of you."

"You're not the first to tell me that and I doubt you'll be the last." At that they both shared a laugh.

"Kamjin, I've come to trust you over these last few months but I cannot have you undermine my authority by circumventing my guard utilizing protocols none of us knew still existed." Shadow stopped and stared at Kamjin. "Yes, you are a founding member of this Clan and we will always respect you. But if you pull that crap again I will have you flayed alive." To emphasize her point she smacked him hard on the arm.

Kamjin feigned to be hurt by the strike. "Yow! Alright, I get it."

"Good," Shadow said. "Otherwise, I would regret doing this." At this, Kamjin arched an eyebrow genuinely intrigued by where this was going. Shadow sighed, "Mauro will be leaving us shortly."

"Why?" Kamjin asked?

"He wouldn't say, though I have my assumptions." Shadow replied. "As such, I am in need of a new Proconsul." Kamjin, ever quick on the uptick, realized where this was heading.

"I see, and such a Proconsul would need to ensure your success and not undermine you."

"Correct. The Clan has battled for quite a while now and finally we have these Force fanatics under heel. What I need now is to understand what's been lost since the Exodus. What other hidden tricks exist within this Clan?"

"Considering most of us that formed this Clan were from the Intelligence Division, quite a bit."

"Exactly. Kamjin, I know your history with this Clan. Join me, share the secrets that have been lost these last few decades."

Kamjin considered his next words carefully. "If I were to unlock these secrets for you; what's in it for me?"

Shadow braced herself, this would either make or break Kamjin's allegiance. Reaching into her robes she pulled out a small holoprojector. Activating it a galactic map appeared with

the course of a ship plotted out. Kamjin's eyes went wide as he recognized what was in front of him.

"How?" he asked.

"You don't yet know all the assets available within this new Brotherhood," she replied, deactivating the projector. "Do we have an agreement?"

Kamjin snatched the holoprojector from Shadow's hand, "Yes, I shall share with you the lost secrets of Clan Scholae Palatinae. It is a small price to pay for my family."

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Twilight was falling as Shadow finished her address to the Clan. Kamjin had already departed to take control of the Star Destroyers in orbit and contact some of the syndicate resources she had provided him. Dek came up beside her, looking concerned.

"Does he know?" Dek asked?

Shadow turned to face him, "Does he know that I scrubbed any information on the ship his family escaped on from the databases or that the information I gave him is fake?"

"Either," Dek responded.

"No and if we're lucky by the time he realizes it we'll have obtained what we need from him."

"This is a dangerous gamble Shadow. He's a powerful Sith. There's no telling what he's capable of." Dek absentmindedly rubbed at his throat.

"I'm confident if we had to you, me, and the rest of the Summit could take him. As long as he's distracted with his hunt for his family he's controllable and that gives us the edge."