

Kamjin blinked as the rising sun crested over the horizon. The early morning rays sliced across his office windows blinding him. As he squinted against the offending daylight he depressed a button on his desk polarizing the windows. As the room darkened to a more tolerable level he returned his attention to his assistant going through the agenda for the day. He half-heartedly listened to the usual run down of appointments, inspections, and approvals that filled the monotonous days between deployments. Playing with his terminal he pulled up the latest purchase orders from Thran to see if there was anything that could distract him.

After several moments he realized there was silence. Looking up, he noticed his assistant staring at him angrily.

"Yes, Daiyu?" he asked, giving his best sheepish look of being caught not paying attention. The Twi'lek was not buying it, having seen this same move daily.

"I said, you have an urgent meeting that is causing a bit of a ruckus with the staff. Do you want me to have him thrown in lock-up until he calms down?" she said with a biting tone cutting through her otherwise flowery voice. Kamjin considered it for a few seconds before determining that he'd rather deal with whatever this commotion was than do another inspection of the cargo facilities.

"I'll see him first," he said.

"Very well," she replied, keying a code into her datapad. The door to Kamjin's office slid silently open. Daiyu was halfway to it when a disheveled Aqualish tech came racing into the room. He snagged his foot on the carpet and flailed into Daiyu, knocking her over. He began to both apologize profusely and thank her for granting him an audience. Daiyu tried her best to tell him it was not a problem at all while saving her hand from being shaken off as he continued his rambling display of gratitude.

Kamjin, chuckling to himself at the site, the poor purple-skinned petite Twi'lek trying to extradite herself from the large, hairy Aqualish. Once it was clear Daiyu wasn't going to succeed he cleared his throat politely but loudly enough to be heard from his desk. The Aqualish suddenly regained his composure and realized someone else was in the room. Spying the Proconsul sitting behind his large desk he released Daiyu and scrambled towards Kamjin.

"Sir...I mean, Admiral, or my liege, uhh, your honor," he said, stumbling over his words.

Kamjin gave his best disarming smile. "Please, just Mav. But, if you must, Admiral is fine too," he said, gesturing to one of the seats in front of his desk. With a wink he let Daiyu know he'd be fine and that she could leave. She scowled at the Aqualish; from his unkempt appearance to his failure of proper protocol. She did not like him nor did she like leaving Kamjin in such a situation. These were the situations that Kamjin inevitably would find a way to get into trouble. She collected her dropped datapad, straightened her uniform, and left. The doors silently slid shut behind her and locked.

"So," Kamjin paused. "You seemed pretty eager to see me. Hopefully there's not something the matter."

"Mav...I mean, Admiral. Is this room secure?" the Aqualish was suddenly looking around nervously. Kamjin considered it for a moment then keyed a sequence into his desk. The polarized windows went opaque and several additional locks activated on the door. The usual background noise, while minimal, completely abated and silence hung heavy over the two of them.

"Yes, this room is now secured." The Aqualish seemed to relax in his seat. "Now tell me, who are you and is this about?"

"Of course, I'm Amda. I'm a maintenance technician third class for the communication grid of the planet."

"I see, and how can I help you?" Kamjin leaned forward, growing curious what such a lowly routine maintenance worker would have tried so hard to get to him.

"Admiral, there's a plot to abduct the Empress," Amda's eyes grew wide with fear at having said it out loud. Kamjin, to his credit, remained stoic and took it in stride.

"There are always threats to abduct or harm the Empress. This hardly seems to be a situation to raise to my attention. Our security forces do a fantastic job protecting not only the Empress but all of the citizens of Caelestis City. Did you report this to your section chief?"

Amda's tusky mouth clattered nervously. "Yes, Admiral. I did and he dismissed them as something for the security forces." Kamjin waited, usually there was a 'but' that would follow a statement like this. Amda's eyes darted around as he clicked his tusks waiting for Kamjin to say something. After a long pause, he continued. "But, this needs to be escalated. I've heard your announcements. If we see something, say something. The security of our Empire is of utmost importances and all of you have a part to play," he said, balling his furry hand into a fist to emphasize the point.

Kamjin just grinned. *At least someone listened to my monthly announcements*, he thought. "You are correct," he said beaming. "You do have an important role to play in our Empire's security. Do you have proof of his threat to abduct our Empress?"

"Yes, I do," Amda said, rummaging through his various pockets. Finally finding it in his fifth pocket, he pulled out a small holoprojector. Gingerly, with both hands, he placed it upon Kamjin's desk. Clicking it on a project sprang up between them. Kamjin recognized most of it as incoming and outgoing communication packets. The contents were scrambled as per the privacy laws enacted by Clan Scholae Palatinae to protect citizens rights to free communication. Amda keyed in several sequences on a datapad he'd taken from another of his numerous pockets. Immediately the packets were unscrambled into aurebesh.

Kamjin scanned the topics briefly, nothing stood out to him. Amda, sensing Kamjin was finding it, rushed in. "Admiral, it's masterfully hidden in these messages. Whomever is doing this is a real pro." Furiously tapping on his datapad several sections of each of the messages started to illuminate. "At first, I thought it was just typos. But then I noticed several typos repeating themselves. I tried to decode it but there was nothing."

To Kamjin's eye it definitely looked like typos. "What made you certain it wasn't a typo. This all looks like typos. An extra letter here that looks like someone's finger slipped before hitting send. This looks like someone just trailed off and forgot to finish a thought," Kamjin said, pointing to each in succession.

"You're right, Admiral and that's what my supervisor said. But, when I ran it through one of the outdated Emperor's Hammer cyphers, I noticed some of the words changed." He again entered a series of commands and the letters and words shifted.

Kamjin looked closely at them. Blinking, he leaned back in his chair. "They definitely changed but it's still random information. That's hardly a conspiracy."

Amda's heart raced as he again typed into the datapad. "You're right but I noticed there was a pattern. If you reorder the words in a repeating pattern of substitution and remove every

thirty-fourth letter, you come back with a message detailing the time and place of the Empress tomorrow and an access code to one of the landing platforms.” The words rearranged again and the message Amda alluded to could be seen.

“Amda, this is definitely a concerning bit of information. But, isn’t this a bit of fantasy? Going through such an elaborate cypher that’s been known and broken for decades and this randomized substitution method you could have come up with nearly any message,” Kamjin said. “Why, I bet if you removed every twentieth letter you’d get a recipe for Porg soup.”

“Admiral, you have to listen to me, this is a credible threat!” Amda said, raising his voice. Kamjin had enough of this charade. Rising to his feet he slammed his fist into his desk.

“I have listened to you,” Kamjin said, bringing the full weight of his command voice to bear. “What you have is so contrived and spread across hundreds, if not thousands, of messages, that the statistical likelihood that this is an actual threat versus the contrived plot of an overworked technician seeing mystical threats in the daily communication log is staggeringly against you.”

Kamjin sat back down. His voice softened as he continued. “You’re clearing doing the best work for the Empire and I appreciate that. Perhaps I can get you some leave time. A couple weeks to help relax your mind and allow you to focus on the good work you’ve been doing.” Kamjin pulled open his lower drawer and rummaged around for a pad to submit a leave request with his approval. He found one buried in the back of the lowest drawer. As he sat back up the projector had changed yet again.

“What’s this?” Kamjin asked, innocently.

Amda glared at Kamjin, “A recipe, Admiral. A recipe for what looks to be a most delicious Porg soup.” What happened next happened in a blur of motion. Amda reached for his comlink and Kamjin’s hand shot out, his fingers pinching at invisible air. Amda dropped the comlink as he grasped at his throat as an unseen pressure constricted his windpipe.

Kamjin stood, raising his hand, pulling Amda up into the air. Amda gasped for breath, “How...” he coughed, struggling for air. “...could you...know...soup?”

“I must be getting rusty in my old age,” Kamjin said calmly. “I’d never have let slip about that hidden piece of misdirection when I was younger. I am sorry, Amda,” Kamjin, to his credit, actually looked sorry. “If you’d had taken the leave when you returned you’d have found yourself in a new position of authority. It’s a rare talent to decrypt a Praetorian cypher. Alas, you reached for that comlink and I’m forced to conclude that you’d continue to play the hero.”

“Admiral...I’m...loyal...”

“Oh yes, I know you are. That’s to be commended. Nevertheless, here we are,” Kamjin said, closing the gap between his fingers. Amda writhed in agony as he fought for the faintest breath of air before a wet crunching sound indicated that his windpipe and neck had collapsed in on themselves. Kamjin released him from his hold and he crumbled to the ground. Reaching across his deck, he picked up the datapad displaying the Porg soup recipe still. Weighing it in his hand he crushed it into pieces.

Sitting back down at this desk, he activated the comm for Daiyu. Before he could start her voice chilled the space between them. “I’m going to have to clean something up aren’t I?” Kamjin smirked, as he began to explain the situation.

