

"It's gotten worse, hasn't it?" Komilia asked the elderly blue Pantoran. While her face was concealed by her royal guard styled helmet, the concern in her voice was evident to the Viceroy.

"He's been locked away for days. Between the Civil War and these crystals. I fear he's becoming unhinged. He keeps muttering about the Mother," Raleien said, a matching look of concern upon his face. While Komilia's was motivated by her love of her father, Raleien's was for the state of the Empire. Scholae Palatinae was fighting for its home system and for its ruler to show weakness, especially this sort of weakness, could have a horrific effect on morale.

"Can I see him?" Komilia asked. Raleien placed a comforting hand upon her shoulder.

"Yes, but, you should prepare yourself. He's not the man you know right now," Raleien said as he walked her down the corridor. He glanced over at the armored woman and wondered what she would think when she saw her father. It was challenging enough keeping the clan on task during a war with an unhinged Consul. What would he have to do if the daughter also became unnerved?

Komilia turned her head to face the taller man as he averted his eyes. She couldn't read minds, could she? His mind turned, could Kamjin read minds? The man was constantly a step ahead of most major engagements. Raleien shook his head to clear the jumble of thoughts from his mind. "Komilia, you don't have to do this," he said, one last time.

"Yes, I do," Komilia snapped, pushing past the man and opening the door. Raleien turned away from the stretch that left the room. All the windows were opaque and the room was eerily lit by the various projections and screens showing a hodgepodge of intelligence reports. Komilia tentatively stepped into the room. She jumped slightly as the door hissed shut unexpectedly behind her. *Coward*, she thought. Raleien clearly wouldn't be joining her in the room.

She clicked off the clasps of her helmet, cradling it in her arm. "Father, are you here?" she asked into the darkness. She heard paper rustling from the far side of the room. She slowly skated around the large holotable to find Kamjin on the floor. A black piece of charcoal chalk was in his hand. Papers littered the ground all covered with roughly drawn symbols. The one her father had insisted showed a birthing mother. She had never seen it.

There were wild circles across printouts of temples, relics, and more with scribbled notes. Komilia couldn't make out the aurebesh but had a strong suspicion she knew what they were focusing on. "Oh Papa," she muttered under her breath. Her heart was breaking seeing this monolith of a man be consumed by this obsession.

Kamjin's head shot up and his eyes focused on his daughter. Komilia dropped her helmet in fright as he scrambled to his feet. He looked deranged. His beard was scraggly, with hairs sticking out wildly. His hair was matted down from the sweat that poured freely from his forehead. His pupils were dilated and bloodshot.

"Komilia," his voice was ragged, like he hadn't spoken aloud in days. "Thank goodness you're here." He grabbed her by her biceps. She couldn't tell if it was to steady himself or an attempt to embrace her.

"Papa, you're scaring me," Komilia said, struggling to free herself from his grasp.

"Good, that's good. We should be scared. We all should be scared," Kamjin said, releasing his hands. Charcoal handprints smeared Komilia's armor. "They laugh at me. I hear them. They think I don't but I do, the fools. There is a Mother! I know it. I've seen it," he said, at

first screaming and then muttering. He reached into a pocket of his robe and pulled out a small, glowing opal. He fidgeted with it, rolling it through his fingers. "I've seen it. They're all chasing this Father figure but that's just a facade. They're going to find themselves out maneuvered before this battle even begins."

"Papa, how long have you been in here?" Komilia looked around and saw piles of dirty plates and rotting food shoved haphazardly across the various surface areas. Kamjin wasn't listening, he had begun pacing. As his twirled the opal he continued to mutter to himself. "You said it was good that I was here. Why is it good that I'm here?" Komilia asked, pleading for him to look at her.

Kamjin stopped and turned towards her. "Yes...It is good you're here. We have a chance to prove it to them. Prove it to them all! Then I'll be the one laughing."

"How? How will we prove it?"

"Long have I meditated here. Stretching my will out into the cosmos. Searching."

"Papa, focus," Komilia snapped.

"Yes, yes. I have made contact with a spy. They know of the truth within these so-called *Children of Mortis*. I need you to find them on Pendroh-I. They will know the truth. They will share it with you and then you shall share it with me." Kamjin's eyes were unfocused.

"How can you be certain?"

"I am certain!" Kamjin snapped, his face clenched in rage. He relaxed after seeing the horror on Komilia's face. "I am certain," he said more gently. "Go assemble a team you trust. Go to Pendroh-I, find this spy and their information and bring it to me."

Komilia went to protest but her father was lost to her. He had turned his back, stroking the opal and muttering again about the mother. She picked up her helmet and reattached it to her armor and left him to his musings. Raleien was standing across the hall from the door, looking up as Komilia exited.

"Is he better," Raleien asked, a mixture of hope and dejection in his voice. Komilia just shook her head. As they began to walk away from the addled Emperor she filled him in on everything her father had shared.

"He's lost," Raleien said, as if his Emperor was dead.

"No, he's not lost. He's just...wayward," Komilia countered. "He's more powerful than either of us know and if he's seen this then there must be some truth to it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to go retrieve this spy's information," and, somehow by saying it, she knew she had made the decision before she even entered the room. She loved her father and she knew he wasn't insane. One day perhaps she'd be able to touch the mystical energies of the Force with the same intensity of her father. Until then, she would trust him.

Raleien balked at what he was hearing. "You're needed here. The whole system is aflame and you're going to go off chasing Kamjin's fevered delusions!" He never saw the punch coming. As he staggered backwards, clenching his bleeding nose, he saw Komilia walk away towards the launch pad.

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“Good night, Sssweet heart,” Slyth said, kissing Lyn gently on the cheek. The Trandoshan rolled back over to his side of the bed and pulled up the sheets. He wiggled his toes and sighed contently. It had taken months but his legs had fully regrown. He didn’t begrudge Lyn attacking him all those months ago. He had led her on and then left her escaping from Dandoran and she had every right to be mad. But in the days that followed they found an understanding and a longing in each of them.

She brightened his day and, for whatever reason, she found him adorable. Life was good. The bar was doing well and Dag, the usually curmudgeon of a Dug owner, was in good spirits. They and their friends were still finding adventure but nothing dangerous like before. But most of all there had been no sign of Kamjin in months. Maybe he was going to disappear for another ten years and leave them alone.

A smile came across his face as he shimmied himself deeper into the mattress. Yes, life was definitely good.

**THUD, THUD, THUD.**

The door to their unit sounded like it was going to come flying off its mounting. Who could be banging on their door like that at this hour. Slyth hit the floor moments before Lyn as they both reached for the blasters they kept by their bed. Lyn motioned to him with her hands, signaling for him to get the door while she covered him. As they crept through the unit, finding whatever cover they could, the pounding seemed to increase in intensity.

**THUD, THUD, THUD.**

Slyth slid next to the door. Lyn, crouched behind their couch, blaster aimed squarely at the door. Her lone lekku twitched with nerves as she nodded to Slyth to key the door open. Slyth tightened his grip, pressed the door control, and jumped back pointing his blaster at the door.

“Uncie Slyth!” a bright, cheerful voice rang out through the voice modulation of her Mandalorian helmet. Komilia, dressed in her purple and pink Mandalorian armor, jumped at Slyth and gave him a huge hug. Slyth’s blaster dropped from his hand. Uncle? Who in the world was this Mandalorian? He’d never seen her before in his life. Lyn, cautiously, rose from behind the couch.

“Uncie Slyth?” she said with puzzlement. “You never told me you had a niece.”

“I don’t. Who are you?” Slyth said, trying to extract his arms from the woman.

“Uncie Slyth, you don’t remember me?” Komilia said, releasing the Trandoshan. Reaching up she removed her helmet. As her auburn hair cascaded freely over her shoulders, Slyth’s reptilian eyes blinked scouring his memory. Slowly, unlocking a memory long repressed from his past it came to him.

“Ko..milia? Kamjin’s daughter? I haven’t seen you in over a decade. You were just,” he said, motioning around his knees. Komilia laughed and blushed.

“I grew up, you know. Papa told me all about what you’ve been upto since I last saw you,” Komilia said, the blush slowly leaving her face. She took in her surroundings and saw Lyn. “Ooo, you must be Lyn. I’ve read so much about you. That is to say, Papa told me you were seeing Slyths now. I love your Lekku, such a stylish way to wear it,” Komilia gushed.

Lyn was taken off guard. “Oh, yes, nothing too fancy, it's bedtime. Did I hear that you’re Kamjin’s daughter?” Lyn had only met the man once but had felt uneasy around him. Something like a nexu in nerf clothing that made her feel like she was a moment away from death. She didn’t like him. But she knew he took care of his friends, at least when he remembered to pay

them, and that was enough for her. Besides, this was his daughter and she looked like a harmless teenager playing dress up in a suit of armor that there was no way she could know how to use.

“Ya, he’s my Papa,” Komilia said, messing with the helmet she held in her hands. Slyth, still not fully recovered from the shock blurted out, “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, ya,” suddenly, Komilia was hesitant. “I need some help with something...someone, that my Papa needs me to go pick up.”

“Komilia, Hibbity and Tiny are off planet. Dag has a the bar booked for some huge event tomorrow...” Slyth started in with excuses.

“Oh, I’m so sorry Uncie Slyth. Not you, her,” Komilia interrupted, pointing at Lyn.

“Uhh...excuse me, ME?” Lyn was shocked.

“Oh ya, you’ve probably had dealings with these people given what happened on Dandoran and that whole nasty crystal business. I figured you may still know a code phrase or something that would help me out.”

Lyn looked at Komilia dumbfounded. Her Lekku moved like it had taken a shot of stim straight into it. She looked at Slyth, then back to Komilia. Komilia tilted her head and mouthed a ‘please’ with such teenage enthusiasm. Lyn sighed and shook her head. “Alright, I’ll do it,” she said at last.

“Lyn?!” Slyth replied in shock. “Can I sssee you for a moment?” He took her gently by the arm and walked her into the bedroom. “Why would you help her? You don’t know what it’s like to work for Lap’lamiz. From what I’ve told you of her father, what makes you think it’s wise to deal with her?”

Lyn gave him a nurturing look as she ran her fingers along his head scales. “She’s just a kid. Sure, Kamjin gave me the willies and I know he’s done you and the others wrong more times than once. But, she’s not her father. She still has an opportunity to be better. Let me try and guide her. Besides,” she paused, looking to see if Komilia was within earshot. “Imagine what it would mean if we had a Lap’lamiz who was friendly to us?”

Slyth’s mind was still reeling but her calming stroking of his head made him see the wisdom in her words. “Okay, but call me if there are problems,” he said, pulling a comlink off the dresser behind her.

“Oh Trandoboo, you worry too much.”

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Qru was unnerved. He did his best to conceal it but to anyone who took a passing glance his way they would know, he was unnerved. Things were quickly getting out of hand. What had begun as a simple infiltration assignment had grown into what could potentially be the single, greatest threat to the Brotherhood. These weren’t just fanatic cultists gathering around an iconoclast leader. The amount of credits, support structure, and (worst of all) the investment in the crystal research. These people were committed to a cause and, unfortunately, that cause was the destruction of the Brotherhood.

As he walked, deliberately under control, through the hallways of the complex he gave the appropriate nod and acknowledgement to his so-called peers. *These people are freaks*, he thought to himself. But it would all be over soon. He had made contact with the Consul from

Scholae Palatinae and he was confident an extraction team was on its way. He patted the disk woven into his clothes, making sure for the umpteenth time that it was still safe.

"Hey Qru, where are you going?" Symith asked, guarding the exterior door.

"Oh, just looking to stretch my legs. You know how it gets stuck inside all the time," he said, trying desperately to keep his voice from showing the strain he felt.

"Qru, you know we're not supposed to go outside if we're not on patrol duty."

Qru had practiced for this moment. "Ya, I know. But I talked to Bositzky and he said it was alright to take a stroll if I stayed within the 50 meter perimeter."

Symith looked troubled. "Are you sure Bositzky said it would be okay?"

"Definitely," Qru said, a bit too quickly. Thankfully Symith didn't catch it. He pondered it for a moment longer.

"Okay, just stay within the perimeter," he said, opening the exterior door for Qru. Qru gave him a clasp on the shoulder and walked through the door. Breathing that deep breath of fresh air, he slowly, but deliberately, began working towards the edge of the perimeter. *Kamjin had better have that extraction unit waiting for me*, he thought.

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Lyn tightened the crash restraints on her harness in Komilia's ship thinking immediately that perhaps Slyth did not worry enough. Komilia was flying this ship about as well as a dying bird flies through a hurricane. As Lyn fought to keep her last meal down for the third time, she strained her head to look at the girl behind the controls.

"Now this is flying!" Komilia, exclaimed as she threw the controls to port and sent the ship spinning.

"What in the Force's name are you doing?" Lyn said through clenched teeth.

"My Papa said the best way to avoid being detected by planetary sensors was to act like a free falling astrological artifact. So, that's what I'm doing," Komilia said, throwing the controls hard to starboard. Lyn felt her insides violently shift to the other side as the viewport blurred. She was completely confident that Komilia had missed the point of her father's lesson and was just letting the ship careen out of control.

"If you don't straighten us out we're going to skip off the atmosphere," Lyn said, certain the strain would cause her to crack a tooth.

"Alright, but if we get picked up by the sensors it's on you," Komilia said as she let go of the controls. Lyn never would have believed it but letting the ship fly without control was somehow a more manageable experience than letting Komilia continue to control the ship. The flame leapt around the viewport as they hit the atmosphere. The shielding dissipated the majority of the heat as they continued to pick-up speed. As the fire died down and the bluish/gray sky filled the screen Lyn let a breath she hadn't realized she was holding.

"Did your father tell you where to meet this spy?" Lyn asked.

"He said not to get too close but gave a general area. We'll be landing in just a few minutes."

*Oh thank the makers*, Lyn thought as she was confident any more of Komilia's flying would result in her stomach emptying over the dash.

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Qru could barely see through the sweat in his eyes. He didn't dare stop to wipe it as he ran through the trees. The moment he had crossed the perimeter the alarms had sounded. He thought he had been smart crawling through the fallen rotted tree that happened to breach the sentry sensors. Yet, the moment he had emerged from the trunk the alarms sounded and he could hear the guards starting to give chase.

As he ducked under a low hanging branch he risked a look behind him. Several dozen meters behind he saw his pursuers shooting at him with their warhounds straining against their leashes. Returning his focus in front of him he doubled his efforts. If they let those hounds loose or if he made one mistake they'd be on top of him.

*Kamjin, I swear, you have to get me out of here.*

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Lyn pulled the trenchcoat tighter around her as Komilia led the way through the forest. The morning dew hung heavy on the flora as they stomped their way through the trees. They had landed a fair distance away from the compound to avoid detection. Despite Komilia's initial appearance Lyn had learned that she was actually competent in her hunting skills. Someone had taken the time to train her as she had concealed the ship against any passing patrols and had navigated the terrain well so far.

"How much further?" Lyn asked.

Komilia checked her vambrace. Spinning the dial she zeroed in on the secret syndicate transponder code. "Not too much further. He's making his way to us," she said, checking the indicators. "Get down," she snapped suddenly.

Lyn's instincts kicked in and she found cover besides her companion quickly. "What is it?" Lyn asked.

"He's being pursued. There's easily a dozen or more people following him," Komilia said. She unslung her sniper rifle and brought its scope to her helmeted eye.

"A dozen? Komilia we can't take on a dozen people. What's your plan?"

"I'm thinking!" Komilia snapped. As she surveyed the forested area desperate to pick up the spy. Above them beams of light, as bright as the sun, cut through the foliage.

"Komilia, they have support craft. This is getting out of hand."

"I'm working on it!" Komilia said, adjusting the scope's settings. She picked up the movement of the spy and his pursuers. They were gaining on him.

"I've got at least six targets immediately behind our target," Komilia said

Lyn pulled out her pair of macrobinoculars and zeroed in on where Komilia was aiming. She could see the spy. Zooming out she saw not only the six pursuers but the other dozen or so people in rapid pursuit. Adding in the air support this was a losing proposition.

"Komilia, we're not going to be able to get this guy out."

"We have to get him out," Komilia said, turning around to face Lyn. "This could be the only way we can prove Papa is right and there is a mother behind all of this. Without this spy everyone is going to think he's crazy.

"If we don't get out of here none of that is going to matter. We need to go!" Lyn pleaded.

“But we have to save him,” Komilia said, and Lyn didn’t know if she meant the spy or her father.

“Komilia, we have to go now,” Lyn said again, now openly pleading for Komilia to come to her senses.

“If we don’t save him he’s going to spill the beans that he’s a spy for us.”

Lyn stared at the girl. “You know what you have to do then,” she said, cold heartedly.

Komilia stared up at the purple Twi’lek conflicted on whether this is what she needed to hear or if she hated her for saying it. Lyn matched her gaze, unfazed.

“Sithspit,” Komilia said, returning to her scope. She took in all the information, exhaled slowly and squeezed the trigger. Far off in the distance Qru didn’t have time to react as the blaster bolt pierced through his skull. For all her earlier doubts Lyn was impressed with the shot the teenager had made.

“Come on, let’s get out of here before they come searching for us,” Lyn said. Komilia stayed prone on the ground.

“I’m sorry Papa. I’m so sorry we won’t be able to prove it,” she said, as she got up and joined Lyn in their race back to their ship. In the distance the pursuers had caught up with Qru’s lifeless body. Not bothering to wonder what had stopped him they ransacked the corpse to find the data card and ensure their secrets remained safe.