

---

## *Familiar Strangers*

---

The spaceport terminal was alive with the comings and goings of all manner of folk. Common folk with children and luggage in tow mixed with lone travelers away on matters of business and pleasure. He looked down from the VIP lounge over the buzzing mass. Contempt sat on the edge of his tongue, as if he could curse each of them. Somehow, each of their meaningless existences felt even less meaningful when measured as a whole; looking at them like this was like watching ants in a glass cased farm.

Thran turned away from the window, settling back in to the passably comfortable arm chair. He lifted the glass of mineral water to his lips, tipping back a sip of the clear liquid. It tasted of iron and soapy alkali. He scoffed and set the glass down. It was a cheap excuse for luxury. It was probably tap water bottled and branded as pure natural.

“Pardon me, young man. Do I know you from somewhere?” the older man said, tucking a datapad under his arm and craning over to inspect Thran.

“You probably do, Gramps.” Thran replied, paying no regard to identifying the person with whom he spoke.

“It’s just that you look very familiar to me.” The man said, settling down uninvited into the chair adjacent.

“I get that a lot, I suppose.” Occasus replied, rolling his eyes.

Sadly, this was a conversation he’d grown accustomed to. It was one of the many prices of celebrity. People tended to believe that since they’d seen him on a holoscreen, that they could approach him with ease. They often tried the sly little technique of feigning not knowing exactly who he was as a path to open conversation. They’d start with a “do I know you?” or a “aren’t you that guy?” These types of exchanges were why he preferred to travel via chartered flight. The worst he’d have to deal with there is cutting through the thick Rylothian accent of the flight attendant to understand what was meant when she asked if he’d like a hot towel. He sighed to himself, knowing he was trapped by the old man’s ramblings.

“Oh, yes, well perhaps it is better to be seen as familiar to others than it is to be not seen at all.” The older man remarked.

“Yeah, I guess.” Thran replied, pulling his cap down slightly over his face.

“Sure are a lot of people out there, eh? Do you ever look out over the crowd and wonder where they are going? Or more interesting, where they came from?” The older gentleman said.

“No. Never crossed my mind.” The Holo-vid star replied.

“Oh, I do. Curious, isn’t it, that we so rarely think about the lives of others. So concerned with our own business, our own affairs...Especially you young folks. In such a rush all the time. You don’t take the time to slow down and appreciate that the galaxy is a big place full of all sorts of interesting folk. Thing is, kid, when you get older, you can’t help but slow down.” The old man said.

Thran slumped down further into the chair. He knew what was coming next; this poor bastard’s whole life story and more questions. He squeezed his eyes shut, praying that the effort he was exhausting in forcing his eyes closed might grant him the ability to bend time enough that he might skip over what would be a very taxing hour until his flight was called.

“Oh, yeah, I tell ya what. I’ve met many interesting people in my life. Seen many interesting things too. There was that one Laserball player with the robotic arm. Boy, I tell ya he could really launch that ball.”

“Cybernetics will do that...”

“Or that one time I met Max Reebo. Well, Didn’t really meet him, but I saw him real close.”

“Thrilling.”

“Of course, there was all those Navy men too. Admirals and governors. Big names in their own right. But I reckon, People don’t talk about them anymore.”

“No one talks about the losers.”

“Hrmph. What makes you think I was talking about the Empire?”

Thran sat up a bit and reached out for the glass of mineral water. He took a sip, clicking his tongue at the foul aftertaste in his mouth. Though at first he wasn’t interested in holding a conversation with the man, each word that was passed his direction held with it a distinctive twang that had caught his attention. It was familiar to him, but he couldn’t quite place it. However, it was Thran’s fascination with the Galactic Empire changed his demeanor instantly and entirely. This old man might be interesting after all.

“Your response just told me that you were.”

“Heh. Aren’t you a clever one...”

“Where’d you serve?”

“Oh, I wasn’t in the Navy.”

“Army?”

“No, no. Nothing like that.”

“Oh, I was just curious. My father was Imperial too.”

“Hrm. I suppose he doesn’t talk much about those days either.”

“Wouldn’t know.”

“What? Why’s that? You ain’t one of those good for nothings that don’t talk to him ‘cause he served are ya? Some kinda damn hippy...”

“No. Not at all. Died when I was really young.”

“In action?”

“Something like that. He was at Endor.”

“Oh...the big E. Sorry to hear that, kid. We lost a lot of good men that day. Honest men, just working their way through this galaxy as best they could.”

Thran could see the old man processing the memories, through the Force he could share the pain that came with each thought too. The octogenarian balled up his fists slightly. Behind the anger in the old man’s heart, there was a deep sadness. There was a lifetime of loss in those thoughts. Friends, family, children. There was a mountain of broken dream, of unrealized goals and shattered aspirations. There was the broken heart of the lies that came in the years after. Thran could practically feel the splat of rotten vegetables against the old man’s heart and he could equally hear the profane heckling of the mob.

“I didn’t mean to...” Thran humbly suggested, without completing the thought.

“No, no. It’s fine. Lot of tough memories there, son. See, I was at Endor too.”

“You were?! Tell me about it!”

The annoyance of being disturbed by the old man’s presence was now a distant memory. Thran’s green eyes were alight with excitement and he tipped his cap back to better show his face. A survivor of the Battle of Endor would be one of the most interesting people Thran could think of. He was beyond curious. His mind raced with questions. Endor hadn’t just been the site of the end of the Empire. Endor, in its own way, was the starting place for everything he’d become. Losing his father as a child had shaped everything about his life. It turned a loving mother into a cold-hearted beast of a woman. The Battle of Endor, for a time, had made Thran in to the loneliest boy in the Galaxy. It led, through the march of time, to him learning his own brand of resourcefulness. It took him off Bakura and put him on a search. Endor was the start of everything he knew. He had to know more. His heart pulled him into the conversation.

“Easy now, son. I’ll share what I can.”

“Did you go to the Academy?”

“Heh, sure did. Carida, class of 5AFE.”

“No way! My Father graduated in that same class!”

“Lots of us did, kid. Course, I went on to further schooling afterwards. So, I didn’t really get to work until, oh geez 9 or 10AFE. Things were good back then. Empire sent me and the missus all over. Set us up with nice accommodations too.”

“Where was your favorite deployment? Were you ever on Kuat? Bilbringi?”

“Oh, we were all over the galaxy. Though, I reckon that I was happiest when I got stationed back at home. Just a minute, boy, I’m dying for a drink.” The old man paused, waving over a serving droid.

The polished chrome chassis of the droid reflected streaks of bright light, even in the dim warm light of the lounge. It leaned over to the old man.

“I am Cee-Two-Four-Ay, how may I be of service?” the droid asked.

“Get me a brandy.” The old man said, firmly grabbing the droid’s arm. “Namana. The good stuff, too. Not some cheap well manifold degreaser.”

“Certainly, Sir. Would the other gentleman care for a refreshment as well?”

“Yes...as a matter of fact...I’ll have the same.” Thran replied, cocking a quizzical eye at the old man.

“Excellent, Sirs. Please remain here, I shall return with your libations in precisely...Forty-six point seven seconds.”

“Bah, quit yapping you box of bolts and get the brandy already!”

“My apologies, sir. Right away.” The droid replied as it waddled off.

Thran examined the older man. The closer he looked, the more familiar he was. His jaw was sharp and angular, under the folds of age sagged skin. His complexion was fair, other than some spots from, presumably, one too many daily glasses of brandy. The Sith paused for a moment. He swore that he knew this man.

“Damn things. You talk at them and you’re never really sure if they understand what you’re saying. I, for one, don’t trust ‘em one bit.”

“Where are you from, old timer?”

“I reckon you already know that, son.”

“Bakura...”

“You’re on it now, champ. Knew you were a bright one. Namana brandy is the good stuff. It’s the only thing that keeps an old cratsch like me going some days.”

“I know what you mean...I’d kill for a Chateau D-”

“D’aarmont Very Special Old Pale...Reserve”

“Well, I’ll be damned...you are Bakuran.”

The old man adjusted his position in the heavy seat next to Thran. His head tilted and his eyes narrowed. He looked directly into Thran’s eyes. For a moment, their gazes locked on each other. They stared into the other’s turbolaser bolt green eyes. They both saw a reflection, as if they were looking in a mirror. In that split second it all became clear. Neither needed to say a thing. Neither one had a doubt. They sat there in silence for ten or twelve seconds. The clinking and whirring of the service droid broke the silence. Two snifters appeared before them.

“Two glasses of Namana Brandy for the gentlemen. Could I interest you in an-“

“No.” they said in harmony.

The droid skulked away, off to attend to other patrons. The two men sat in continued silence. The bustling of the lounge the only sound in the space. Their green eyes were locked in a battle of will to determine who would cave and speak first. A maelstrom of emotions ran through Thran. Rage, elation, confusion, and loss all at once. He wasn't even sure he could process the words to speak. He opened his mouth to say something, but it was not his voice that filled the space between them.

“I've looked for you for a long time, son. Turns out, you're a bit of a wily one.” the old man said, smiling slightly.

“Who are y-“

“Oh, come on Derc. You know damn well who I am...Don't play the fool. I've seen all that you've done, you're no ignoramus. Wish you would have put more time into school, but it's a little too late for that now. But, ya done things your own way”

“You have some nerve...”

“I know, boy. I wish it hadn't taken so long either. But look at everything you've done in that time. That station of yours...Some design you cooked up there. Real clever. Hell, you touch more credits a day than I ever saw in a lifetime. You're loyal to your people. Your people love you. My son, the Emperor. Who'd've thought?”

“and do y-“

“Of course, son. You're my, boy. I've loved you since the first time I held you.”

“Then wh-“

“We don't always get to choose what happens to us, Derc. You of all people should understand that. The galaxy has a way of putting circumstances before us which are just plain out of our control. It is how you react to that fact that you can truly measure yourself as a man.”

Thran's head was spinning. Fourteen million and six questions were running through his mind, each fighting for first position out of his mouth. His mental scramble for focus was broken by the clattering of glass and metal. He turned to look. The service droid had dropped a tray of glassware in the middle of the floor. No one was near it.

“Wis wamble bit bap, scor florvin bat alougash” the droid spoke in twisted electronic words.

He'd never heard any language remotely like that. It was certainly was strange, but droids malfunctioned from time to time. Thran shook his head and turned his attention back to the conversation.

“Adversity makes everyone stronger, Derc.”

"Do you know what I've been through?" Thran spat as quickly as his lips could carry.

"Yes. My heart breaks everyday thinking about it. I tried, son. I tried to get back to you. I saw you got my journal. I'm sure you read it. You know that's the truth. I can't change the past, son. If I could, I would undo it all. I can't do that. Best I got is that I am here now. Best you have is looking at where you are too."

"What took s-"

"Like I said, kiddo...You're a wily one. Didn't make it easy on me, didja? It's not exactly easy to track a Sith that doesn't want to be found. Especially one with three hundred seventeen aliases. Fizzy Tucold? Really, son, is that the best you could do?"

"At the time, yes. What about mo-"

"You don't worry about that. This is about you and me. I'm sure you have so much to say. So do I. But we don't have much time."

The service droid began squawking out a horrible shrill sound. Thran turned to look. The droid's head was spinning, laying out a thick blanket of smoke. It squeaked and chirped as the smoke pooled around its feet. Thran raised an eyebrow. That was odd indeed.

"Derc, I need you to know. I never wanted any of this for you. I'm so sorry, my son."

"Papa..." Thran barely croaked the response as he turned back to the older man from the ruckus across the room

"Look at you, son. You're so sharp of mind, clever, creative. You're tough as vibronails. You've built an Empire...Twice. Your plans are grand and there is no one who can stop you. All you need to do is believe that yourself. You need to let go of this part of your past, Derc. It drove you at first, my boy. Look how far it got you. But now, You let it haunt you. It is a new galaxy you're living in...The people you hate are gone. You're chasing ghosts, son."

"I don't understand, papa...The Rebels..." Thran choked on his thought, as he was drawn back to the confusion building across the room.

"No, my boy. The only enemy you have left is yourself. Get out of your own way."

Thran coughed. The smoke from the droid had filled the room. At some point, a bird had gotten loose and was flying about in the clouds. The Sith narrowed his eyes, trying to level the confusion. This was all so much. The shadow of a bird whipped over him. He swore that the creature was wearing shoes and socks. That was odd too.

"Don't overthink it, boy. Just remember...You are the best part of me. You are everything I worked for and I am so proud of you."

The last words never landed in Thran's ears. His eyes tried to follow the bird through the smoke. It was getting thicker now. He could barely see in front of him. He heard the squishing and sloping of some manner of tentacled horror off in the distance.

"Papa, we have to leave." He said, panicked.

“No, son. I can’t go. Just remember...I am proud of you.”

“Papa, now. We have to go now!”

Thran was anxious. So much so that he didn’t hear his father’s last words. His arms felt heavy. He looked down. He was sinking into the armchair. He tried to free himself, he jerked and writhed. Panic was overcoming him. He couldn’t sort his thoughts out. He wanted to run. He wanted to scream. He wanted to scoop up his father and leave this place. He couldn’t. He was helpless. The smoke poured into his lungs. He gasped...

Thran shot up. The room was dark. The smoke was gone. So was his father, Callus. His breath was short, gasping for air. His heart was racing and sweat had pooled on his satin sheets. His eyes darted back and forth, searching for an answer to the memories of just a moment ago. It had been a dream. It was a terrible dream. He searched his memory. What was it that his father had said, right there at the end? He couldn’t remember. Thran sighed and laid his head down once again.