



The
Thrawn
Diaries

Here are the journal entries 1-10. They are Daughter of the Empire Trilogy centric and are in a loose chronological order. There may be more at some point but I have no big plans to write another book but every now and then his voice pops into my head and the results are what you see. If you have not read the DOTE books then a lot of what is written here will either make no sense or be spoilers – just saying.

Gonna go for the standard disclaimer here:

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This story, which is a companion piece to the Daughter of the Empire Trilogy contains spoilers for just about everything ever written/filmed in the Star Wars world from the time period shortly before A New Hope up until and including Timothy Zahn's Heir to the Empire Trilogy. Read at your own risk, you have been warned!

Personal log: 35:2:4 Coruscant

There are days when I truly ponder the decision I made to leave my homeworld. It was not an easy decision to make and I did not make it lightly yet here I am, the only Chiss warrior, the only Chiss at all, serving in the Galactic Empire much to the disgust and mistrust of those who should be working to serve with me not against my every move. I knew what I was getting myself into. I understood the risks involved but there are days when trying to work with Palpatine and his minions is an uphill, seemingly pointless battle. Never in my life have I met a man so clever and devious yet at the same time so childlike and selfish. There is no denying his immense power or that his ability to think in large terms but he allows his ego and his pride to get in the way of good sense which is very detrimental as well as deadly when one does not conform to his point of view. When I first agreed to come and work for him I had no notion that it would often be like working for a spoiled child. It is tedious.

Today I found myself especially annoyed with his inane mind games and I really do have to wonder if even he sees just how churlish and childish he is being or if this, too, is all part of a larger guise that even I cannot see. I do not doubt that he has the welfare of this galaxy, of his Empire in mind but some days one would think that all he cares about is personal power. A very wise man once told me that the only thing powerful people tend to want is more power and that often the desire to obtain more power supersedes all other concerns. He was not wrong in this statement.

I dislike all the games and the ridiculous court politics where appearances and manners have more importance than strategy and careful tactical planning. If everyone one is far too scared to give an honest opinion then nothing can be accomplished. This becomes an even larger issue when these petty, self centered concerns outweigh the wellbeing of the men and women who serve in the Imperial Forces both as ground troops and in the navy. I detest losing good people due to greed, self righteousness and the desperate lust for personal gain. These losses add up and they cost us dearly in time, training and experience. There is no excuse for such wastes or stupidity.

Today's discussion over a possible weakness in the design of the so called "Death Star" battle station left me speechless with frustration. All it will take is one accurate missile strike and the entire reactor core will blow destroying the whole space station with one shot. Prevention would be a simple matter of adding a hardened durasteel grill over the shaft's opening so that any missile strike which may by some chance hit its mark will only impact on the surface and not at the vulnerable core. One would think that this addition or correction would be self explanatory but no, according to the experts, this current design is flawless because the opening to this shaft is far too small for any targeting computer to properly calculate and it is an impossible shot for anyone doing it manually. I have learned in my time that the word impossible does not exist and improbable means that there is always a chance something could actually happen. The obtuseness of the current leadership train of thought astounds me. It's simple maths that eventually someone could very well beat the odds and make the shot so why risk these odds at all? Isn't spending a small amount more on an addition to completely eliminate this threat worth more than perhaps losing the entire station and its personnel? Apparently not and I left the planning session today in dire need of some quiet and a good stiff drink. I know exactly where to find the former but the latter is still up for debate.

I overheard some scuttle-butt a few weeks ago that Lord Vader had actually taken on the latest victim to be parcelled out to him as a personal assistant from the HR. A little research told me that the young woman in question has quite the resume and more whispers let me know that she is force sensitive. I did some research on her but aside from the obvious there was little to learn. Luckily as Captain I don't rank high enough for such nonsense and even if I were to be offered such an assistant I would prefer to deal with the majority of most matters myself instead of trusting them to an office worker. That may change however.

There was some talk about a new rank being handed out, that of "Senior Captain" to bridge the gap between Captain and Admiral. Ridiculous really. I do not understand why they do not use the rank of Commodore and be done with it but Palpatine does have some strange ideas on the entire ranking system and as he changes this with every whim I am quite sure it will be a passing fad that comes and goes the way some of the palace courtesans do. The idea of being called senior anything is ridiculous and makes the rank in question laughable, sounding more like a placement in an award show or a home for the elderly than an actual military rank at all but I digress. The thought that Vader has actually taken an interest in someone other than himself is intriguing and after having met the young woman in question I can perhaps see why. I do hope she will manage to survive longer than her predecessor did.

When I am on Coruscant and at the Imperial Palace I tend to stay away from the more populated areas. It is easier to think when one is not the constant subject for speculation and gossip. I realise that as an alien I am a curiosity here but it does get tedious from time to time. I found, a long while ago, a quiet area in one of the older less attractive parts of the palace. This place was not part of the major, more recent renovations and has been left mostly untouched. It's considered to be unfashionable by the majority of the people who work and even live here so it is a place I enjoy coming to when I need a respite from the stupidity I face on a daily basis when I am at court. Today, however, I was unpleasantly surprised to discover I was not alone. I walked out to find a young woman perilously perched on the balcony balustrade. I didn't want to startle her for fear of her falling off but I needn't have worried.

There were two things that stood out right away. The first was her hair and the second was the fact that she did not turn around but she knew I was there. When I approached she did not even bother to look at who it was instead she handed me a glass of what has to be the worst alcoholic beverage I have ever tasted in my entire life. I learned that her father makes it and it is my opinion that he should be shot for doing so, however I kept these thoughts to myself. This, as it turns out, is Vader's new assistant and she is not at all what I had imagined.

I mentioned her hair because it is a lovely and unusual deep shade of red and in the setting sun's light it was truly beautiful. She had it done up with zenji sticks, a style I have not seen used here all that often, not that I pay much notice to such things but using zenji sticks properly is not easy so I was impressed. Amongst the rumours that have been circulating about her the one about her lack of fashion sense seems to have been the least accurate. I found her clothing to be serviceable, flattering and comfortable looking which is more than I can say for most of what the sycophants here tend to dress in. It never ceases to amaze me how much time, effort and credits go into what has to be some of the worst examples of clothing in the galaxy. People will wear anything if they are told it's fashionable.

One of the most intriguing things about meeting Vader's young assistant was her apparent lack of concern about my appearance. I stand out. I am not human although I am humanoid. My skin colour and my eyes set me apart instantly and it has been my experience that most people here follow Palpatine's rather xenophobic view on aliens which leads to great prejudice among other things. This young woman did not seem in any way shape or form bothered by the fact that my skin is blue or that my eyes are red. She gave me a casual once over and then went back to her musings. The conversation we had was even odder by palace standards.

She seemed bothered by the fact that I had information about her and that I knew who she was yet she offered to share her drink with me without even looking at who she was sharing it with, without knowing anything about me. Her manner was a strange blend of forthrightness and caution mingled with a naïveté I found strangely alluring. My time here with the Imperial court has left me somewhat jaded and mistrustful of everyone and everything around me so her blunt manner and refreshing honesty were incredibly out of place although not unwelcome.

I am unused to being spoken to in that way and I found myself in the startling position of not wishing the conversation to end, of not wanting to let her go even though I had obviously insulted her in some way. As she stormed off I made a grab for her arm, hoping to placate her or at least understand what I had said to offend instead this made matters worse. She did not take kindly to my touch and surprised me even more by threatening to kill me if I should ever touch her like that again. Here, for the most part, court women tend to fawn over just about anything or anyone who wears a uniform even me despite the fact that I am an alien, so when she went on the offensive and began to jab at my chest with her finger in anger and berate me for my brashness I was caught off guard.

'Men like you who think they can grab a girl and have her' she said. At the time I was too taken aback by her attack to respond but thinking on it now, I must have come off every bit as arrogant and thoughtless as many of the officers I find repulsive myself. It is troubling to recall this moment because this is not behaviour I would ever endorse. The only excuses I can find are the terrible alcohol, which is not an excuse at all, and the fact that for the first time in as long as I can recall I felt a sense of arousal and a powerful attraction which left me, for lack of a better word, breathless and *'thinking with the wrong brain'* as an old friend of mine would say.

How is such a thing even possible? This mere chit of a girl from what has to be one of the most backward planets imaginable actually managed to strike a chord within me that I thought I had long since buried and forgotten about. Duty comes first and one never mixes business with pleasure ever. I have always prided myself on my ability to eschew all things carnal but in this moment I found myself surprised by it. It was not my intent to be boorish and rude simply to hide how I felt yet this is exactly what happened. I was relieved when she accepted my apology. Now, upon reflection, it seems surreal. Yet when I recall the flash of fire in her eyes and scent of her skin, as well as her feisty manner coupled with an ability to see through deception and a canny sense of self being I find I want more, much more.

How is it that of all the women I have met in this place the one I find myself drawn to just happens to be favoured by Vader? This cannot be coincidence and I wonder if there is not some grand design at work which pulls me in deeper just when I question my usefulness here and think about leaving to pursue other avenues by which

to protect my people. This girl is a mystery I now wish to unravel and in order to do that I must remain here within the confines of the Empire working for a man I find as repugnant as I do interesting. The irony of it all does not escape me.

Personal log: 35:5:2 Coruscant

Every year it is the same thing. The first day of the fifth month the Emperor opens the Imperial Palace to the elite, the wealthy and the influential and holds the much anticipated Grand Ball. This year, as with every year, it was the usual grandiose, intrigue riddled affair but in difference to previous years this time I saw it from a vastly different perspective. It changes one's perspectives to see such a huge extravaganza through the eyes of someone who has never seen it before. It's an amazing event that appears lovely on the surface but underneath the pretty is a whole other unpleasant world. Merlyn was right when she asked me if anything ever happens here without subterfuge and secrecy and of course the answer is mostly no.

Here at Palpatine's court all is clouded by desire and ambition. Amidst the seamy backdrop of this glittering event, extravagant, lavish and full of deception Merlyn was out of place. This outwardly gorgeous ball is a cesspool of scyks all vying for attention and hoping for gains, it is not a venue for naïve young women. I dare say were I to call her naïve to her face she would take offence but it is the truth. Perhaps she has been exposed to some of life's more unpleasant sides as she has inferred but I doubt very much it has prepared her for what she experienced tonight. Of course nothing prepares anyone for being presented before the Emperor in front of so many witnesses and I do have to wonder at his reasons for doing so. The most likely explanation has to do with Vader and I am quite sure that Palpatine was making some sort of a point and using this young woman to do so. Yet, surprisingly enough, for all the pressure placed upon her she took much of it in stride. There was a brief moment where there were tears but her body language let me know I was to politely ignore them and so I did, choosing instead to dance with her, hoping to take her mind off the less than stellar moments of what should have been a wonderful experience for her. Think what I will of the Empire and Palpatine, this is an event that is never forgotten and not experienced anywhere else in the galaxy.

On the subject of dancing I find myself bereft of words. Merlyn was not lying when she said had been trained in the art of dance but she lacks experience when it comes to partnered, formal dances however once her trust is earned in this area she takes direction well and is a delight to dance with. Something happened while we were dancing a waltz and I am unable to explain it but I assume it has some connection with her Force abilities. It felt as though she was somehow able to take her emotions, as well as the power of the music and the dance and project them into, onto me. I lack the words to describe it aptly but it was very powerful, passionate and stimulating. I don't even think she really knows what she does and perhaps this is a good thing. I am quite certain that should she ever choose to unleash this power in all of its strength she could command a room of warriors to bend their knee to her will. The air between us was electrifying. In more ways than one this young woman is as dangerous as she is delightful.

The evening, as usual, was filled with meetings and introductions to all the right people, political wrangling and lower ranks trying to get the attention of higher ones. I do so find this particular aspect tedious but it is necessary and I comply. Palpatine has made it clear I am to play along and act the part. No one must know of my true role here

or that he was instrumental in my being here. This ruse we play where the rest of the galaxy believes I am a tolerated, found curiosity becomes tedious after a while and I find myself weary of the day to day stupidity that accompanies this game playing. On Csilla, while I may not agree with our policies, at the very least everything is straightforward. Each ruling family has their place and the rules are, for the most part, upheld. So I do as I am told here and I play the games but I find them and many of the players to be detestable. Perhaps that is why, in part, am so drawn to her. She has not learned this art of deception yet. Her moods, her thoughts are readable on her face, through her body language. I feel that with her I can be myself. She does not appear to judge me based on my appearance or my race but rather on the man I am, my personality, my manners. She sees beyond the skin colour into my soul. It is unnerving. I am not used to being judged this way. It may well be the reason why I decided to go to her flat after she had left the festivities. I wanted to be in the company of a person who asks nothing of me. That is a rare respite amidst the whirlwind of lies and deception.

I must admit I felt a surprising surge of disappointment when I heard voices coming from inside her flat but I rang the doorbell anyway and left a glass on the doormat hoping she would understand the message and know where to find me should she wish to see me. Here it does not do to be too obvious about one's possible intentions nor does it do to assume that she has no other suitors because whether she sees it or not she is lovely and after being presented to the Emperor tonight she also now has a place of importance. I am quite certain that I am not the only man who is interested.

I wonder when it was I lost my grace. When it was that this life I now find myself living sucked so much joy out of me. I have become old in this place and if this is the case then am I trying, like so many men my age, to recapture some lost youth by courting the heart of a young woman who stands at the beginning of her career and life not somewhere in the middle of it.

It turns out that my concerns that someone else has her interest were unfounded and what happened between us on that balcony we both like was unexpected and delightful. I cannot, this time, blame my bold behaviour on bad alcohol but perhaps the heady mixture of her perfume and the brandy we were drinking made me less inhibited. Our conversation was unusual to say the least, I am starting to wonder if this is actually the norm for her and as we spoke, as she asked her questions and expressed her worries I felt a peculiarly overwhelming sense to protect her although from what exactly I couldn't say. Although there is a fine thread of strength running through her she seemed very vulnerable. Perhaps it was unfair of me to kiss her in the manner I did but I do not care, it was worth it. I know she is attracted to me because I can read it on her face, in her eyes, in how she responds to me as plainly as the day. But I also scare her and rightly so.

It is easy to see that she has not yet been taken to a man's bed and taught the pleasures of sex so it is only natural that my attentions and the feelings they stir up in her are overwhelming, at least, so it appears. Her eyes were as wide as saucers and she was trembling at my touch but she returned my kiss and did not slap me so I assume my attentions were not unwanted or undesired. Her inexperience is surprisingly delightful and it pleases me to think that I may be the one show her more of this delightful world of seduction and physical pleasure. As I write this I am astounded at how history repeats itself and I find myself thinking back to the woman who taught me the fine art of copulation and how to be take pleasure as well as how to please. Oddly enough I can no

longer recall her name but her face and her lessons will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I was a young man at the start of my career. She saw something in me and took me under her wing to *mentor me in the finer arts of the bedroom battlefield* as she so eloquently put it. Under her guidance, both patient and insightful, I learned to map a woman's body as much about I learned the needs, the abilities and the limitations of my own. I can still hear her sultry voice telling me *'It is easy to fornicate for the purpose of procreation. You copulate until seed is placed in the hopes for a union of sperm and egg. There is no mystery, there is no artistry needed and pleasure is not a requirement. But to make a woman's body quiver, to make her wanton with need and full of fire only for you, well that requires more.'* And then she had proceeded to teach me these skills slowly, with agonizing clarity. She taught me well. It was not a love match, she had made that abundantly clear from the very first moment she asked me to her bed and now looking back I see that I was a conquest of sorts or perhaps better to say a project. We were together for just over a year and when it was over we parted amicably with no regrets.

It is not unusual in Chiss society for such pairings as long as they do not interfere with other arrangements and produce no unwanted offspring. I had my entire career in front of me, as Trial born I understood that eventually I would be expected to pair with a suitable mate and provide offspring infusing my genetics into the Mitth bloodline. Such matches have little to do with love and everything to do with duty. However now this is now a moot point. I am an exile, a disgraced warrior who cannot officially return home. I am free to choose with whom I bed, to choose a partner, to choose my bondmate.

Now nearly thirty years later I find myself drawn to a much younger woman and I have to wonder if I have become one of *those* men. Do I seek some sort of affirmation through sex with this girl or is this more? Does this go deeper than simple lust or should I walk away. I have no answers and only time will tell what this is. If my comm had not interrupted our kiss I wonder how far things would have gone because I cannot speak for her but as first kisses go this one was extraordinary.

I do not need this distraction and make no mistakes she is a distraction. It is a good thing I am now back in space. I do not need the complication of a relationship of any sort. However, I can safely say that the dress she was wearing was indeed worth it, she was breathtaking and I now have one of the most beautiful holocaptures I have ever seen taken when she was unaware that she was being captured by the holographer. I believe this is the start of an attachment and I am standing on the precipice. I should be concerned but I am not, instead I find myself full of unexpected anticipation.

Personal log: 35:7:24 ISD *Vengeance*, Chommell sector

I find myself thinking about Thrass. It is not often I indulge myself with thoughts about my older brother, the memory is still painful. He is still listed in the Chiss Military Archives as Missing in Action but I feel, I know he is dead and he has been for a very long time. This passage of time, however, has done nothing to alleviate the sensation of loss and I miss him as much now as I did when we still held out hope for his safe return. His death has left a large hole in my life I never imagined possible. He was my brother but he was also a Merit-Adopt for the Mitth family, the same ruling family as I and even though it annoyed me to no end he looked out for me, as brothers, as family should. As I sit here awaiting the arrival of Merlyn so that we can hopefully unravel a mystery about a planet called Myrkr I wonder what he would think about my interests in this young woman. I wonder what he would think of her.

He was less open to trusting strangers especially people who were of an alien race, who were not Chiss. He was less than progressive in his thinking, more observant of the rules and regulations by which the Chiss, particularly Chiss military lived their lives, a stickler for protocol. I am certain he would be very unimpressed by my foray into romance by having a relationship with a human girl half my age. I can almost hear his voice calling it *a ridiculous infatuation, little brother*. And I do have to wonder if he would have been right as he was about so many things. As a young man of twenty I found him to be rigid and already set in his ways although upon reflection I see now that he was being cautious and protective with me. He was being my older brother at every turn, doing what brothers do and now I find myself missing his steadfast nature and honest practicality more than I can ever put into words. I do also wonder sometimes if he had lived would I have made the same choices, would I have come here in the same manner? Or even at all? My exile would have horrified him and most likely shamed him greatly and for this reason alone I am glad he is not around to see it. He would not have understood and sometimes, were I to be absolutely honest with myself, neither do I. I tell myself that I am doing this for the good of my people but there are days when I do have to question this thought process especially when I see such blatant waste and cruelty in this so called peaceful Empire.

Yesterday morning I taught Merlyn how to swim. I must admit I had been surprised by her admission of not knowing this skill but of course, as is usually the way, the simplest explanation is also the least obvious. Who is in need of such a skill when one's entire home world is comprised of sand and rocks? On such a world one learns how to treasure water not frolic in it.

The lesson would have been delightful had it not been for Vader's handiwork. She was black and blue from a supposed combat training session with him. What was he trying to teach her by almost beating her senseless? By the look of the bruise on her arm he damn near broke it. Her reaction to my obvious anger was also puzzling. She was awkward and embarrassed about the bruises she sported but she was also defiant and defensive about how she came to have them. I am truly curious about what strange bond ties her to that foul tempered man that she would defend his actions and their painful looking consequences. I know she was hurting and I was, am livid as well as powerless to do anything about it. As much as I desire to intervene, to protect her I have learnt better. Theirs is a relationship I do not and probably will not ever understand and while

lack of loyalty is not one of her faults how does one justify being beaten so badly all in the name of a combat lesson? She is just a girl and he is a bully with enhanced strengths. He should know better. Still if she survives his training lessons in sparring these skills will be of great use for what is to come.

Myrkr, if I am right, holds the key to somehow dealing with the Force and possibly controlling a Jedi's power. I will never be held in thrall like that again as I was by that Jedi master C'Boath and sooner or later Palpatine will feel the need to 'put me in my place' with his powers. I will not let this happen however irony, it seems, likes to play games and in order to find what I need to I must have the use of someone who is Force sensitive and that I can trust. These two attributes in a single person are in very short supply especially the latter and Merlyn is the only one I know who has both. I hope that I am not mistaken about her loyalty because, as lovely as she is and in spite of my feelings towards her, I also need her trust and that is something which goes far deeper and is much more valuable than stolen kisses by the lake. Thrass would call this a foolish endeavour that I am wasting my time on a myth but so much depends on this, so much depends on me being right. I am willing to take this chance.

I cannot fulfil my oath to serve and protect my people if I am dead and if I have no defence against those who wield the Force as a weapon those who can kill just by bending a thought to their will then I am forever at their mercy and whim. This is not a tolerable situation. I do not like being in situations where I cannot control the outcome to some degree or another.

Thrass would have indeed had some very choice words about what I hope to accomplish on Myrkr and about how I intend to use Merlyn's unique talents, for that matter, I think she will also have some very choice words but I hope she will play her part never the less, almost everything depends on it.

Personal log: 35:7:32 ISD *Vengeance*, en route to the Moddell Sector

As I make my way towards a meeting with Palpatine, including a short stop along the way to pick up an old friend, I am placated somewhat by the knowledge that I now have access to a viable defence against the powers of those who can manipulate the Force. Finding Myrkr was fairly easy once one had access to all the clues. Discovering its incredibly well kept secret was a whole other story.

My first encounter with a Force user left a lasting impression and not one for the better. The leader of the Outbound Flight Project, C'Boath, used this invisible, unchallengeable weapon against me in the form of what I know now is called Force Choke and I was utterly powerless to stop him or fight it very nearly dying in the process. Needless to say this is not a position I ever wish to find myself in again. It is probably a very good thing that the Jedi Order had a strict code of conduct and that Palpatine finds me of use or perhaps it is that I simply amuse him which keeps him from inflicting me with more of this Force Weaponry.

It is not without some irony that in order to discover Myrkr's secrets I found myself having to seek the aid of a Force user as a means to an end. Luckily for me Vader's office girl has some talents with this mysterious power and Vader granted her leave to accompany me. She was less than impressed with the tasks she was given but she carried them out with minimal argument and surprisingly good grace.

I was not wrong in my assessment of her powers and abilities in fact, if anything, she surpassed my expectations. What began as a means to an end trip however turned into something else, something quiet unexpected and incredible not to mention a little foolish. And I have done something for which I shall be expected to explain before a Dantassi council and I fully expect that there will be some form of retribution involved because my actions were and are unprecedented.

How can I describe what took place on Myrkr? It seems now, looking back, to hold a rather dream like quality and in my mind's eye all I can really picture is her dancing when she decided to show me her teeth and punished me for the situation I placed her in. This trick she has of pulling emotions and using them as a weapon is remarkable and unnerving and I suppose that I did push her too far by asking her to perform as a dance-slave for a group of base, mannerless men.

I quite rightly deserved her wrath but I had no idea she would turn her talent in this area solely on me and the result was surprisingly difficult to deal with. If used properly she could turn men mad with desire and all I know is that in that moment, when she had me in her thrall, it took every bit of my self control not to jump up and sweep her out of there so that I could have my way with her. This is an unacceptable position for an adult Chiss warrior to be placed in. For the first time since I have known her I found myself both furious and aroused at the same time.

This is a deadly combination of energy so when one of Ormate's animals tried to rape her I did not even think about it when I broke his neck. I know my actions scared her, as they should have, but it was my fault she was even in this situation to begin with, it was my duty to protect her. I do not regret what I did. Nor do I regret the look on her face as I took care of her would be rapist. Perhaps next time she will think twice before turning that lovely little force talent of hers on me again.

It has been a long time since I have worn my Dantassi clothes and mask. There is not much call for such a disguise within the confines of working for the Empire. I was rather taken aback at how much the clothes and mask scared her making her oddly submissive. I learned after our first day on the planet why that was and it was intriguing to hear her take on the Dantassi. It felt strange to hear her talk about the encounter with hunter when she was a child and to learn how much he terrified her. I have known the Dantassi people a long time and fearsome is never a word I would use in describing them although it is an image they self cultivate. Perhaps that was part of the reason for my actions later on. Perhaps I wanted her to share my love for this wholly remarkable race of beings instead of them being the source of nightmares.

I knew going in that Ormante would double cross us. Given his nature this was to be expected but discovering whether or not the myths surrounding Myrkr were true outweighed the dangers. I also knew that in spite of what Ormante might have thought between Merlyn's hand to hand combat abilities and my strategic skills he was no match for us, men like him rarely are. All talk and no substance and far too much reliance on machines and technology. I did not, however, count on the vicious quadrupeds we encountered attacking us nor did I plan for Merlyn being as badly injured as she was. She should have been taken straight to a bacta tank but a chance encounter with a pirate put end to that plan. She will carry a scar on her leg as a reminder of this trip for the rest of her life.

Her combat skills are far beyond the description Vader assigned to them. I watched in awe as she fought grown men twice her size and strength as well as the most savage looking quadrupeds I have seen in a while. She did so with a grace that was astonishing. How anyone could make something as deadly as hand to hand combat look so beautiful is beyond me. It reminded me of the way sunlight moves on fresh snowfields. She may not think of herself as having skills in this area but I would beg to differ and I would have her at my back in such situations again without hesitation.

We are just getting to know each other and, the physical attraction aside, she is a creature of extraordinary talents as well as grace and good nature. Watching her move is a delight, watching her move while wearing practically next to nothing is the most distracting thing I have seen in many, many years. If she had known the effect that ridiculous dance outfit had on me she would have run as far away from me as possible. There are days when I am deeply grateful for the strictness of Chiss upbringing when it comes to the schooling of our emotions.

As I look back now at what happened on Myrkr and afterwards I realise that she has given me the greatest gift of all, her trust. She may not believe this but it's true. She placed her life in my hands not once but several times and did not question this at all. She very nearly lost her life on board of my ship (a whole other journal entry and not to be dealt with here) but it did not appear to diminish the trust she placed in me at all. I envy her this blind faith and I wonder if one day I shall be able to do the same and open up to her completely. Whatever this is between us is off to a promising start but it also leads to emotional attachments which is something I can ill afford at this time. I do, however, wonder if it is not already too late and that an attachment is already there. Perhaps it is and I am being too stubborn to see it, judging by my reaction to her near death on board the *Vengeance* this might very well be the case.

At the Imperial court she is privy to many secrets and she has the ear of one of the most powerful men there is. There are whispers that she is Vader's spy if this is true

then she is incredibly good at the art of deception and I am being utterly deceived. I don't believe this to be the case. There is such a sweetness, an innocence to her which has not yet been stripped away by Vader's brutality or Palpatine's manipulations. I'd dearly like to believe she is exactly who she appears to be and if so then I wonder if, at some point, I can return her trust as easily. Right now we are not quite there but I have hope. There are precious few people in this Galaxy I can completely be at ease with. I would like her to be one of them.

So perhaps in reaction to or maybe because I feel she earned her place by the right of combat, I have taken her into my Dantassi family by giving her a name, by marking her with the blood of her kill. This ceremony, however small it may have seemed to her, will have lifelong lasting repercussions, for the good I hope. I, however, will be called to task. What I have done there are no precedents for. I do not believe she has any idea of the significance of my actions which, for now, is a good thing but I wonder, down the road, if this will change and if it does what she will then think of me.

Personal log: 35:9:26, ISD *Vengeance*, en route to the Ishanna system

So now Palpatine knows I have competition for the territories in the Unknown regions of space out here on the Rim's edge and this particular enemy is devious, a worthy opponent. Let the games begin. Palpatine underestimates Nuso Esva but I am well aware of his cunning and his powers of persuasion. I have won this round but there will be more I am certain of it.

It was good to see Jorj again but I fear for my friend's life. He appears to have utterly lost his way from the young, hope filled man who stumbled into Chiss territories with his smuggler friends. He has aged and he has given up. I am saddened to see him so, I had thought he would do great things with his life and while heading up a major crime organization is in its own way a great thing but somehow I find myself oddly disappointed by it. When he asked me why I had insisted he come along I told him it was because there was no one else I trusted but this was not the truth. There are other people in this galaxy I do trust but none I would want at my side during a mission such as this. There are many reasons for this but perhaps the most pertinent one is that Palpatine would not tolerate it, as it was I was hard pressed to get him to agree to allow Jorj to accompany me.

I wonder sometimes if Palpatine believes he made a mistake in bringing me into his Imperial fold. I am not quite as docile as he perhaps felt I would be. I do not always play by his rules and I certainly do not subscribe to his methodologies as far as ruling this Empire go. The man is a megalomaniac at best and I shudder to think sometimes what might happen should he ever go completely insane. I am well aware that he does not like that I have an opinion of my own but he tolerates it because as Merlyn would put it, I get the job done, usually with a minimum of casualties and damages.

So without much help from Palpatine the issue of Esva, for now has been taken care of. I must admire the way our esteemed Emperor plays his hand. In spite of my best efforts to the contrary he manipulates me along with every other member of his court and I am surprisingly powerless to stop it. Due to the way in which things worked out, I was able to obtain the man power and ships I required for this operation and Vader was happy to be given new leads on these Rebels but I doubt we have seen the last of Esva. I shall say this about my work for this Empire, it never gets boring.

Now onboard the *Vengeance* we are headed to the Ishanna System and I have some time to reflect on many things not the least of which are my growing feelings towards this young woman both Vader and Palpatine seem to have taken more than just a passing interest in. What is it about her? What? We are drawn to her like flit-moths to a flame. I should be concerned about what happens to flits when they touch the fires that have so beguiled them in but oddly enough I am not, I am instead compelled to get closer. I have said this before but it bears repeating she is a mystery I am looking forward to unravelling and I recently learned that this mystery has attracted yet another man to her side.

Some few weeks ago she went to Rothana at Palpatine's behest. A simple courier job that turned, as I suspected it would, into something much more. Palpatine is testing her at every turn and while she suspects this I think the full extent of how she is being tried escapes her completely. Her powers, fledgling and unpredictable have attracted Palpatine's attentions. She is far too trusting. Perhaps it is this trait that won the heart of Kirja'navaar'inkjerii whom I have neither seen nor heard from him in many years, in

fact I did not think that our paths would cross again and yet here we are connected by this girl.

This girl, this extraordinary young woman, who upon first glance can seem so innocuous, has the strength and the tenacity of the fiercest Dantassi warrior yet it is her fragility that disarms men such as me. I would never have imagined for one moment that I would enjoy being the hero or the center of someone's world but oddly enough with her that is exactly where I wish to be. If she is a lure set out by Palpatine to trap me then she is the perfect bait, if it is something else, something far larger and far less within my control then I must question the very foundations of my beliefs.

As a rule I do not subscribe to the theory that everything we do is preordained nor do I believe in coincidences. I suppose, if anything, I believe we make our own fate, we choose our own paths and that every choice we make is a conscious step. We make our destiny not the other way around. I find it difficult to believe that at any given moment in time I am not in control, that fate decides everything I do, am and will be. I believe that the paths we follow are of our own creation without help from any deities or the mysterious hand of fate. This being said I cannot help but marvel at this universe and how it somehow finds a way to make me re-examine these lines of thinking.

The Dantassi say there is no such thing as coincidence that we are exactly where we are supposed to be with exactly the people we are supposed to be with. It does not matter what choices we make or why. All of this is meant to happen exactly as it is happening. Da'han weaving her giant tapestry and we are her threads. I would argue this theory vehemently but somehow my opposition to this way of thinking no longer holds as much weight as I did before. This universe is vast. The unknowns and variables are astronomical. So why, then, after I take Merlyn to Myrkr and end up spontaneously performing the Dantassi naming and familial bond rite on her not only giving her a Dantassi name but also a place in my own clan as well as a token from a man long dead that she meets perhaps the only other man in this entire galaxy who not only knows my Dantassi name well but would be able to recognise that token, who also happens to be the grandson of the man that carved it. How is such a thing possible in a galaxy without coincidences or fate? That two people from utterly opposing sides of all things meet at exactly the right time and place. This was not just coincidence, this was remarkable. I have not spoken with Kirja'navaar'inkjerii in many years although news from Hjal reaches me from time to time. He is the one Dantassi warrior obligated to help her and the odds of them meeting at all were astronomical unless one believes in fate, which I do not.

Yesterday I received mail from Merlyn. I had not expected her to respond to the note I left yet she did and she was surprisingly eloquent given that her normal manner of speech is usually quite forward and somewhat colourful in its Mos Eisley docking bay colloquialisms. This dichotomy is yet another aspect of her that should not have surprised me but it did. Her letter was full of warmth and felt a little like a running commentary on her life in the moment. I smiled as I read her words, almost able to hear her voice but when I came to her charming impression of Demetrius Zaarin I felt a sliver of concern.

I fear he has set his eye to her and will not go away cheerfully just because she turns him down. He is a man used to getting everything he wants and not accustomed to hearing the word no. He is far more dangerous than I think she gives him credit for and I dearly hope that he will not get fed up playing whatever games he is playing with and

go directly on the offensive. While I have no doubt she can put him in his place this would not be a wise showdown as Palpatine values Zaarin for a number of reasons. She is right about him being arrogant though but then again so am I, which leads me to wonder why she accepted my advances and not his. Perhaps I just hide it well.

Finally she opened up to me and spoke a little about her past. This man, this Jyrki Andando has her so tied up in knots that I was surprised she was willing to write about him. Her teenaged heart was broken by him but I do not think his actions broke her the way a first love sometimes will. There is a very great difference between the two and I am grateful she is, as of yet, unaware of how painful such things can be. When we kiss I do not see hurt and fear in her eyes so much as I see uncertainty and a little bit of trepidation. I know I please her because I see it in how she reacts, her pupils dilate, her cheeks flush and her breathing quickens in turn igniting my own desire. It is a heady mixture, remarkably potent.

She has been burned a little so naturally she is cautious about touching this particular fire again but I think that given the right coaxing, the right incentives and perhaps the right amount of sweetness she would willingly follow my lead. I am also well aware that should this go further, much further, then perhaps it will be me who breaks her and I have no wish to do so but fate, if there is such a thing, seems to want to say otherwise about my particular wishes in this particular matter. If I had my way I would never have gone near her in the first place now it is too late to back out and to be honest I do not wish to. This is a distraction I do not need but given the way I felt as she curled herself into my arms and subsequently fell asleep as though it were the most natural thing in the galaxy to do I am not so certain that I do not want it. There is something rather intoxicating about being placed in the role of protector and suitor at the same time. I desire her to see me as good, as someone she can trust, as the man who perhaps has her heart and this desire, I am terribly afraid, will be my undoing if I am not careful. I am not even certain that this pairing is not something that Palpatine has had a hand in but right now, as I hold the memory of her body curled against mine and the scent of her perfume in my mind, I find I do not care.

Now I must formulate an answer to her letter and prepare myself for the next time I meet Kirja'navaar'inkjerii because most assuredly there will be a meeting between us, his gift and the words he had Merlyn pass on to me have made that a definite. In the meantime I have a job to do. One thing I can say about my life since joining Palpatine's Empire. It is anything but dull.

Personal log: 36:01:03, ISD *Vengeance*, en route to the Unknown Regions

I wonder, as I sit here, when did I become so entrenched on this path that I now feel the terrible urge to write pages of maudlin prose about this woman I appear to have become besotted with? Become? No, I am besotted and it is too late to step back. I am already hers she just does not know it yet.

When did I cross that line? When did it become clear to me that this was more than a passing fancy brought on by a libido too long ignored? I can pinpoint the exact moment. It was that single second where I waited too long for her to join me on the balcony after the Winter Fete Ball. Timing is everything and missed opportunities weigh so heavily when they mean the difference between being in time and being too late. I was too late.

When she did not return to me I carried through on my threat and went looking for her but instead of surprising her in a manner which would have been mutually pleasing I was met with all the signs of what must have been a swift yet brutal struggle. Judging by the mess, the blood and the fact that I found her necklace caught in the wall panel marking the entrance to the secret passage leading into her apartment she must have put up one hell of a fight and I would expect no less. For a single moment I knew an intense fear which only my years of training overrode.

As soon as I came to my senses I alerted palace security immediately and told them about my findings but too much precious time had passed and she along with her abductors were probably already off planet by the time Coruscant Air Control were notified. How does one overcome this fear for the life, the suffering or death of another especially someone we care for, have affection towards? I must ask myself why do I feel so responsible? I am neither her guardian nor her sworn protector. I did not abduct her yet I find guilt about what has happened to her has crept into my thoughts never the less. As powerless as I was to protect her from whoever stole her away with violence and brutality, and I have my suspicions as to whom this is, I am even more powerless to save her.

Palpatine, once he learned of what had taken place, forbade me from planning and mounting a rescue citing time and unreasonable costs of a manhunt for one person. He informed me on no uncertain terms that my talents are to be directed elsewhere and I was ordered back to the Unknown Regions to continue my work there. Because I was forbidden to search for her myself I made a detour to Hjal to seek the aid of the Hjal Jhal'kai but the council refused my request outright. I understand their reasons for this but it infuriated me and only served to strengthen my resolve to find a way to place some better safeguards in her life. How is it possible, with all of the ships, the weapons, and the manpower that I feel so impotent? After speaking with Kirja'navaar'inkjerii I have begun to take steps which will change this although much of my plan hinges upon Merlyn's safe return.

Underneath it all I suspect that this is a test; that Palpatine is gauging her strengths and her weaknesses seeing if all of the training she is undergoing is paying off, if his patronage is worth it and if she is and will be a useful and valuable asset to him. While I dearly hope that he is not responsible for her abduction I am certain this is a situation he is using to his fullest advantage with her as the unfortunate victim and my anger at him, at this situation, knows no limits but I keep it hidden and contained.

Palpatine must not ever know the extent and depth of my feelings in this matter although I am certain he is aware of my growing affections for her.

It occurs to me that this is also perhaps a test for me, of my obedience as well as my loyalty but I have come too far and given up too much to lose everything on a fool's errand and Palpatine knows this. I suspect he wishes to see what I do when presented with such a choice, and if he thinks I will disobey him and drop everything to play the hero then he is mistaken. So now I must wait and hope that Palpatine's expectations of Merlyn are not only met but exceeded. This waiting is a dreadful thing.

In this quiet moment of time and space I suddenly understand what it could be to hate another being absolutely, what would drive a sane man to insane acts in the name of emotion. As Chiss we are warned of this, taught from childhood to abandon such emotional responses in favour of logic and reason but this does not mean these emotions do not exist, far from it. So here I am burning with a sense of helplessness, flames of loathing fanned by a growing knowledge of being played and in this moment I also understand a fraction of what Vader must experience on a daily basis. This gut gnawing fury is not an emotion I am enjoying very much. It clouds the mind and obfuscates the facts. This subtle, almost exquisite manipulation by Palpatine makes him a more than worthy adversary. Now I see that in spite of my desire to remain aloof, to work within the confines of this Empire alone I am not alone any longer.

I have committed the unthinkable sin and allowed myself to get close, to become attached, to know and desire affection from and for another and now I can only wait and see if she lives or not. If Palpatine is right in his thinking that she is the sum of her training and she will be able to escape then I pray that she is not damaged by the ugliness of this experience and that the man who has taken her will not break her beautiful spirit or quell that delightful fire and love of life she has. I know fear for her well being and fear for the possible loss of her in my life and with these thoughts I understand that, as far as she is concerned, my downfall is complete.

Personal log: 36:01:12, ISD *Vengeance*, Outer Rim Territories

I have been thinking lately about a rather odd exchange I had with a young girl named Tash on the planet S'krrr some weeks past. She and her little brother were visiting the gardens along with a relative and while there we all had a rather unfortunate run in with some ravenous beetles. She found my presence unnerving and she seemed quite convinced that I was there to stalk her and that the Empire is this wholly evil entity all set to swallow up every single being and made some rather unattractive comments to this effect which surprisingly enough annoyed me. Is this how we teach children tolerance and balance? How do they ever learn these things if everything they are presented with is given in forms of black and white, evil vs. good? Nothing is that simple.

I realise that these two children have cause to mistrust and perhaps even hate the Imperial war machine given that they survived the destruction of Alderaan and are wanted fugitives but stating that "The Empire is up to something" is more than a little overly dramatic. Whoever decided to go after children, however, should have his proverbial head examined. Even if there is something to the suspicion that one of these children is force sensitive chasing them halfway around the galaxy would be a ridiculous waste of time, effort and resources and I could have told them it simply isn't done. The Imperial navy has enough to deal with without launching a manhunt after wayward children and their anthropologist relative based on theories and conjecture.

I felt compelled to inform them that the Empire, such as it is, consists of billions of beings from millions of worlds and for the most part they probably do not even consider the rule of the Emperor for more than a brief moment as long as their own personal lives and infrastructure goes on as normal unimpeded by anything out of the ordinary. It should also be noted that these self same people would cry loudly enough for the Empire's might to come to their aid should anyone dare to attack their way of life.

Upon reflection of what took place on Sk'rrr I have been thinking lately about the subject of children, specifically about the values they are taught and how we, as adults, unthinkingly pass along our own personal biases to them as we teach them about their day to day world. This brief encounter has left me with a great deal to consider and I have come to the conclusion that should I ever be fortunate enough to not only father children but have a hand in raising them as well that I shall endeavour to teach them as fairly and as openly as I am able about all forms of government and ways of life so that they might make informed choices and conclusions about the Empire without bias or wildly inaccurate information. Of course the subject of children is not one that comes up often in my line of work, especially for me.

Perhaps had I stayed on Csilla with the CEDF I would have been bound to a suitable match and mated so that my blood mingled with an existing familial blood line helping to keep the Ruling family's blood lines fresh as is the norm but that is not the case. By being banished I have become free to choose whether or not I find a suitable mate and father children. I find that as my life stands right now neither a mate nor children play any part in it what so ever. Familial obligations are not always in the best interest of men such as myself in times such as these. I have no doubt that were I to become a father I could provide a good life for both child and mother but I am grateful that I do not have to do so at this time. Of course it is only natural that thoughts of

offspring lead to me to thoughts of Merlyn and the worry, which I have managed to set aside in favour of doing my job, resurfaces.

There has been no word as to her whereabouts and this silence weighs surprisingly heavy upon my shoulders. I was able to converse privately with Lord Vader a few days ago after a tactical briefing and while he said very little, as is his way, he gave me the impression that he is also concerned for the wellbeing of this girl. Usually my conversations with this man are taciturn and to the point leading most people around us to think we are at each other's throats but this could not be further from the truth. While I do not agree with how he treats people and I find his temper and brutality to be less than desirable leadership traits, one cannot dismiss the man's abilities and talents out right. We often discuss tactics and stratagems in private far from prying eyes who would like nothing better than to stir up the proverbial scuttlebutt pot pitting the Emperor's "Iron Fist" against his "Pet Alien".

The truth of the matter is that we actually tend to get along for the most part and in spite of his bad habit of spontaneous brutality there is much to be admired about the man not the least of which are his skills as a pilot. I find it best to try and work with my superiors rather than against them and aiding them rather than hindering them in their goals tends to go a long way to self preservation. If a few more Imperials learned this they'd probably live a lot longer. It is easy to dismiss Vader as an arrogant puppet of Palpatine but I would wager good credits this is far from the case. Vader is very clever in his own right and deserves the respect he has most definitely earned. This being said I disagree with his brutal methods of teaching Merlyn but then again I am biased when it comes to his office girl, I admit to this failing, but seeing the bruises he inflicted on her after what I can only imagine must have been a brutal training session angered me.

It is my opinion that a good leader inspires loyalty rather than beating fear into his subordinates. I have known men and women to follow a superior into hell and back due to good leadership skills and an ability to foster dedication through means that do not require the use of Force Choke or other rather nefarious methodology. Vader was not always this way but he has certainly become the epitome of cruel and vicious although I have to say that one only has to look at the master behind the student to understand where this comes from. Palpatine, while giving the appearance of a benevolent leader is anything but.

In my life I have seen many things that I might ascribe the word evil to but none come close to Palpatine. I am quite certain that at the heart of everything as far as the Emperor is concerned greed and the desire for more power rule above all else. The problem is this; Vader's cruelty and ruthlessness are immediate and very visible Palpatine's on the other hand are so subtle that often it takes years to untangle the web of his more than artful machinations. Palpatine's cruelty lies in his ability to manipulate with a subtlety that is exquisite. Unlike his student he does not have a penchant for using the force to throttle the life out of everyone who displeases him but rather uses means less visible to the public eye. I have seen and experienced firsthand what happens to those who go against his will and the results are far from pretty.

It has occurred to me more than once that many of the unpleasant experiences young Merlyn has gone through have been made possible by Palpatine's manoeuvring. I know he is intrigued, he has mentioned this to me once, a not so subtle hint that he is aware of my interest and perhaps a warning as well although I have yet to decipher the full meaning of his words on the matter. She is an intriguing young woman with a great

deal of talent in areas that will of course interest a man like Palpatine who collects beautiful and talented beings the way other collect insects or art.

Vader did not seem surprised by my query about her status. I am quite certain that he is well aware of my interest in her and perhaps of her infatuation in me but if that is the case he did not make comment or remark. Instead his reply to my question was to tell me that the Fleet has been put on alert for her should she try to contact any Imperial outpost or ship and that as soon as he heard anything he would make certain to inform me as well. I appreciated this small consideration. When I inquired if he thought she was still alive he assured me she was so I can only assume from this that whatever bond is between the two of them he senses her presence through the Force and for this I am grateful.

One of these days I shall spend more time studying literature about the Force as it seems it is my destiny to be surrounded by people who command and sense it while I remain head blind to its uses but vulnerable to those who can and do wield it. I grow weary of being at the mercy of a weapon I can do nothing about and while I do have an option I could use should I choose to now is not the time or the place. I also think that that there is still much to study about the creatures on Myrkr and how they are able to repel the force. Right now, as Captain of Lord Jerec's ship, I do not have the time or the freedom to explore the options these creatures may provide further.

Lord Jerec has so far kept his usage of the Force as far as I am concerned to a minimum but I am appalled at how much these Force users rely on this power rather than use their brains. I hope for her sake that Merlyn does not fall prey to this trap, it is so easy to lean on such a crutch but when it is suddenly taken away from you in the end all we really have is our intelligence and the ability to use it. I do believe that sometimes even Palpatine forgets this, a case in point being the "Death Star" space station that was recently blown up by the Rebellion. He plans to build a new one, a better one and I can only shake my head in private at this utter waste of money and resources. I have hinted at my thoughts to him on this matter but his response does not bear writing here. Jerec, if he has any opinions on this, has kept them to himself. He rarely speaks openly about anything although occasionally he will let his guard down. His latest comments to me were about my ability to amuse and surprise him. My reply, had I given it, would have no doubt been considered droll but I held my tongue. I seem to do a great deal of this in the Empire. It is getting old.

Personal log: 36:02:28, Hjal

It is late and I am angry. I sit alone in this apartment trying to contain my anger but I am not doing a very good job of it. Usually I find solace in solitude but not tonight. Here in this apartment I am warm, safe while outside the weather rages echoing my own inner turmoil. This is one of the worst storms I have seen in a long time and under normal circumstances I would enjoy such weather but not tonight.

Perhaps I lack the imagination to drive me to extreme behaviour and certainly I cannot imagine what it must feel like to have been so betrayed by a person I once cared for, trusted or even loved. I think this is because there are so few people in this galaxy I give my trust to that such a betrayal is highly improbable. I can count on one hand the number of people I trust and even fewer that I would call friend, or confidant so I am certain I would at the very least suspect something was wrong before any situation escalated out of hand.

I used to believe growing up that Thrass was the more emotional of the two of us, that I was far more cool headed and logical than my stubborn older brother but now, looking back I see this was not the case. While outwardly Thrass appeared to be less rational more emotionally driven than myself it was and still is the other way around. I see that now. I excel at tactical, analytical thinking and I maintain the appearance of cool and calm as I was taught to do but within it is driven by passion. Slowly, I begin, after all these years to understand that in order to excel at anything one must also, to a certain degree, be passionate about it as well. No matter who we are, our need to excel, the drive to move forward comes from some sort of emotional base. My brother was driven by ambition and pride though mostly, I think, pride and I see now that my drive comes from a different base, one that is harder to control and has darker consequences. This passion, which I believe I keep tightly under control, has managed to get the better of me and tonight it rages against my need to remain calm in the face of both fear and anger.

As a young man left to a fate of solitude on a planet devoid of sentient beings I learned all I ever wished to know about being alone with myself. I learned that I could live through anything should I wish to put my mind to it and I applauded myself for my ingenuity and my ability to survive any situation by using my intellect. Yet here I sit in solitude knowing no peace at all and I wonder why that is.

I pride myself in my ability to predict the actions of others, I excel at this in fact so much so that the leader of this Galactic Empire saw in me something he could use, something of value and has put my talents to use in ways my people would never have dreamed of yet I cannot predict the actions of one girl and I do not understand how that can be. Of course in this I am not alone in my inability to unravel her twisted way of dealing with pain.

Thrass would not approve of this situation I now find myself in, emotionally involved to the point of distraction, angry enough to lose control and objectivity. When did I become a man who loses his clarity over the life of one woman? I have asked myself this question far too many times in the last twelve hours and still I have no answers. I am baffled by my very visceral response to what she has done. She walked out of the enclave unseen, unnoticed into a raging blizzard, into certain death and the only things I can think about are how worried I am and how angry I am. I am furious at her for this

incredible act of selfishness, for her emotional response to her pain which on first glance seems irrational but upon closer examination is so very human. Escape from the pain and after what she has been through I have no doubt that her pain is overwhelming.

On the journey here I listened to her screaming and crying in her sleep, such as it was, and I could do nothing to ease her suffering. She may have escaped Andando's prison physically but in her head she is still there. According to the medical report I received from Vader there were signs of physical and mental torture and perhaps sexual abuse although the report was vague on that. She will not speak of what happened to her, shutting me out, hating me for intruding and I wish with every fibre of my being this had not happened to her but wishing is a futile exercise. I took leave time to bring her here to Hjal. This is the one place I truly believe she can find peace but I did not expect her to go looking for it in the form of death.

I am also angry at Jyrki Andando, the man solely responsible for this current situation. There are no words with which to describe how I feel about him and try as I might to be logical and clear headed I find where Merlyn is concerned I cannot. Were I ever to come face to face with this man I would kill him and not think twice about the consequences. He may have been at the center of her world once but not any longer. He has stolen innocence and light from her usually bright spirit and I cannot forgive him for this. Primarily though, I am angry with myself because I should have seen this coming.

I am a master tactician, it is my job, my talent to see and read people's moves long before they ever decide to step out on to the battle field but not this time. I expected to find her asleep, safe, warm and perhaps at ease instead she was gone. Kirja'navaar'inkjerii let me know on no uncertain terms that I am not infallible and that he too missed the signs, that in retrospect he should have at least had some suspicion into her plans and perhaps this is true but it is too late to dwell on it. She is gone, wandered off on a planet she doesn't know into weather she is utterly unprepared for. I do not believe she really wants to die but rather that she wishes to step back in time so that this bewildering black hole of anguish she is now experiencing does not exist but there are some things which cannot be undone and the only way to get past the pain is to step forward not backwards.

If she dies out there in this terrible blizzard my guilt will be great and added to the weight of my brother's death. This is a burden I truly do not want to carry. I want her back in safety. I want her whole and alive not frozen to death alone on a cold world that is not hers. The only saving grace in all of this is that Kirja'navaar'inkjerii thinks of her as a child and placed a tracking chip in the mask which luckily for all concerned she has with her. He left to find her and as he is faster on his own I remain here, waiting knowing an anxiety that is unfamiliar to me.

She does not know exactly what I have done to make certain that she will always have the protection and help of the Dantassi people and while I am certain it did not escape her notice that the unmasking ceremony was more unusual than it should have been I am hoping to keep the exact nature of my part a secret until she will not see it as interference. I have my reasons for doing this, most of which can be explained rationally but part of me understands that underneath these rationalizations lies irrational emotion and I fear what I am becoming as far as this young woman is concerned could very well destroy all that I have worked so hard to achieve.

In this moment while I await news of her fate I find I do not care.

Personal log: 36:08:08, ISD Grey Wolf, Unknown Regions

It is rare for me to come up against an opponent who not only shares but in some cases surpasses my skills in the art of tactical warfare. We have been surveying for three months of course surveying is a euphemism for the canine and equine show that has become my personal battle with the warlord Nuso Esva. He is extremely clever and his intelligence matches my own which makes this game we are playing all the more intense. I find that as vexing as these encounters are they are also exhilarating and challenging. I enjoy such challenges. This particular warlord has the unique skill that he seems almost to know what I am thinking and what I will do before I do. We are evenly matched.

This past month has seen us play variations of a rather intriguing jax and rodent games causing no end of headaches for me and my fleet. This warlord taxes us at every turn in our attempts to make contact with the various new worlds and peoples out here. Our goals are to acquire as many allies as possible and obtain access to supplies, raw materials as well as territory. Palpatine has made this desire of his to expand a priority but without the rest of the Empire knowing his true plans.

Esva is, as Merlyn would say, sand in the engine, creating small difficulties designed to intrude and interrupt rather than destroy. His tactic of small hit and fade attacks will eventually wear us down as he has greater numbers and better ships. Esva and I have danced several times now and each time the result has been more or less a stalemate, of course every now and then one of us does occasionally get the upper hand and win a round but for the most part we dance. Merlyn would laugh at this description but she would also understand it. Nuso Esva is a worthy dance partner but the problem is that both he and I are alpha males and neither of us wants to concede the lead.

At last count we have engaged each other a total of seven times and our last encounter saw the victory go to him. I lost seven fighters and took damages that have cost us time and credits to repair. The Emperor will not be pleased to hear of this but in spite of my requests for greater numbers and more ships I am told to make do with what I currently have. I understand that his forces are in his mind stretched thin but occasionally I think he does this to test my abilities in procuring him more territory in these Unknown Regions. I would like to believe that my progress in this respect has surpassed that of anyone else he has previously tasked with this job. While I enjoy the mental challenge of my current work this constant nipping at my heels from this particular warlord grows tedious. He must be eliminated quickly. This is a dangerous game we play and were it not for the fact that I have won more victories than lost in this particular fight I would be tempted to let Esva go and pursue a different area, one less prone to his interference. However the faith and loyalty the crews and captains of my fleet have shown me lets me know that I am right and that this fight will continue until Esva is eliminated.

Currently we are en route to a small system known for its mineral rich planets run by a small coalition of system lords. It would normally have taken about two weeks to survey this area but now it will take us longer because we discovered that Esva has rather cleverly managed to mine the Adjora Asteroid fields in such a way that instead of going through them we now have to go around them. Were it not for the fact that after studying the various artworks from the local species which tells me chasing this

particular system is worth it I would call this off and let it go in favour of a less troublesome target. I dislike wasting time, ships and man power on irrelevant distractions.

Speaking of distractions I received a letter from Merlyn today. Since our time on Hjal she has been studying Cheunh and her proficiency at communicating in my native language surprises me at every turn. She has an extraordinary talent for learning languages and even though Cheunh is far more difficult than most she is able to express herself remarkably well with it. I am delighted by her at every turn and I am also surprised at how her letters thrill me.

Vader has her working from Tatooine and if I read between the lines of her letters their relationship has hit a bump in the road. She does not speak of trouble directly but I sense there is something weighing heavily on her mind and the very fact that Vader has chosen not to allow her to return to Coruscant tells me they are fighting. I will never understand the relationship between them and I disagree with how he treats her but she defends him to the end and I believe that a part of her has imprinted on him, they share a common bond through the Force. This I will never understand but it is not my place to interfere.

Her descriptions of Tatooine and the everyday happenings of her family and friends are so vivid I sometimes feel as though I am there watching through her eyes. Her letters are a jolt, her words are a whisper and I am shocked at the physical sensations which run through me when I receive post from her.

The ways of physical pleasure are not unknown to me. The Chiss, while eschewing emotional based thinking processes in favour of more logical and rational methodologies, do not disregard the need for physical or intimate contact. We are not solitary creatures we are social. The desire to mate for both procreation and pleasure is a biological fundament. I am no exception to this. I have had my share of bedmates but the relationships were, for the most part, purely physical and far from lasting. To use a popular phrase amongst the pilots and crewmen I scratched an itch. I do not allow my libido to overrule my common sense and I certainly do not allow my sexual needs to cloud my thought processes or analytical skills and I absolutely do not let the desire to appease my sex drive overrule my judgement but I find that as far as Merlyn is concerned I have become a cliché.

Our last time together was sweet and full of stolen moments of intense intimacy yet for all that we still have not crossed the line which takes us from courtship to lovers. I find, in quiet moments when I allow my mind to wander, my thoughts return time and time again to moments shared. I close my eyes to draw out these memories and sharpen them. I try to recall the scent of her hair, the surprising softness of her skin and the shape of her body underneath my hands. I bring to mind that appealing curve where her waist meets the swell of her hips or the sensation of her breath warm and moist upon the skin of my neck when she kissed me just beneath my left ear. She elicits such desire in me that sometimes it is over whelming and I understand why poets have described this as a form of madness. Each time we are together we take this dance of courtship one step closer to its logical conclusion. The anticipation of that moment is one I find both delightful and yet full of trepidation. Once that line has been crossed there is no return. I have wondered more than once if I am the right person in this respect for her. She is so much younger and perhaps she should be with a man closer to her own age not someone who is twice her age and perhaps incompatible.

I do not wish to rob her of an important rite of passage because I am unable to control myself but she is a creature of passion and when she responds to my touch in a manner that is utterly arousing were I a man with less self control I imagine that things between us would have gone much further than they so far have. I have never been a man guided by his libido but there have been moments spent in her company where the thought of losing control was more than simply an enticing possibility. The question then becomes what happens afterwards. For me there is no question. I have bound myself to her but she still has free will in this matter and although I do not believe that she would allow anyone to bed her on a whim I wonder if once that particular threshold has been breached if she would still desire me as much as before.

Yet this physical need for her grows with each passing week. Her letters only strengthen what ever bond it is that has formed between us and her words, which tease, make me quite literally ache in a manner that is almost painful. Thrass used to say that desire is a double edged blade. I recall his voice as he spoke these words with alarming clarity. We were so very young and he was in love with a young woman who would not even give him the time of day. I never truly understood what he meant by this until now because I don't believe that I have ever truly fallen under the spell of a woman before. It is ironic that when I do it should be now and with a girl half my age.

So it is, in these solitary quiet moments, that instead of concentrating on the work at hand I am imagining making love with this fae wild creature that haunts my dreams and stirs my blood. I wonder sometimes if she has any idea of the effect she truly has on me. It is probably a good thing if she does not.

Personal log: 37:07:15, Coruscant

I have often heard it said that bad news travels faster than light speed but that is not always true because were it the truth I would have heard about what had happened to Merlyn at the Bunduki Trials long before my return to the Core.

It was late when I landed on the small secluded pad at the palace. I do not feel the need for a loud flashy welcoming party upon my return and take great pains to assure my comings and goings are kept quiet. To my surprise I was met by Taisto Kjestyll. He is a remarkable man and I had already heard many good things about him from Merlyn but this face to face was unexpected. Before he even spoke I knew the news would not be to my liking and it was his wish that I be briefed by him on what occurred at the trials before I could hear this news from anyone else.

I sat in the quiet of his private studio and listened without interruption while he told me what had taken place. Although he did not embellish the events which had taken place I found his retelling disturbingly vivid and it was difficult not to react emotionally. Only once he was done did I ask the unanswered question. *Why.*

His explanation was succinct and placed the blame squarely upon the Griff boys whose plan, despite the outcome, was remarkably clever however he managed to make it clear without actually saying a word that there was much more to this story than he was telling me. I was most intrigued to learn how there was no way that under normal circumstances these boys would have known about the Rite of Tet'zais-tjiumei but of course such information is always available to those who seek it. I read between the lines and when I hinted at my summation I was rewarded with a slow nod. This has Palpatine's stench all over it and I find, even now, my anger at him knows no bounds. When I asked Taisto if he had spoken with the Emperor about discussing these events with me upon my return he replied with the negative.

"I understand you wish to know why I am telling you this now before you meet with anyone else so I will explain. I felt that you should be made aware of her situation as soon as possible by me. As her teacher and trainer I am responsible for her and I feel that in this case I have failed her. I could have stopped this fight but I did not there are many reasons for this not the least of which was I felt it necessary to allow her to choose her own path. I did not think it would go as far as it did. I believed that she would best the Griff boy and then walk away, which she tried to do, but instead of being satisfied with this outcome he chose not to stay down, he chose to take the fight to the bitter end because his anger and his rage blinded him. She had a split second to decide between life and death. As I have always known and I suspect you do as well, she chose life. However, as I have explained, the injuries she sustained were dire. It was your name she kept crying, it was for you she whispered as her heart stopped the first time." He told me. "In my experience people on the edge of death do not call out for those they do not care deeply for."

I asked for clarification on his statement about her heart stopping the first time.

"She had broken ribs one of which had punctured her left lung, she was bleeding internally and the shock of the trauma was quite hard on her system. We were fortunate that we had expert medics at the event and the trauma team at the emergency med lab knew their jobs. Once Lord Vader was informed he had her moved to what is probably one of the best medical facilities on this planet and the care she

received there is what saved her arm and her life. She crashed while they were preparing her for tank immersion and her heart stopped twice.” He explained. He paused and took stock of how this information affected me. “Admiral, I have trained this girl for long enough to understand that you are important to her and now that we have met I can see that it is you who helped to guide her on her warrior’s path. It was you who were present at her first kill and if I am not mistaken it was also you who recognised this and named her in a traditional rite of passage.”

When I asked if she had told him about this he negated by shaking his head.

“I did not need details to see she had changed upon her return to Naboo. She also does not always do a very good job of hiding things from the people she likes and trusts. This was easy for me to read. You must remember I have been training young people for a very long time and reading this girl is not difficult. She had changed and I was able to piece together much of the story without her having to betray secrets or confidences. You honoured her by acknowledging this rite of passage and in doing so you also honoured me. I return this honour now by making certain that you have been properly apprised of her situation. She brushed death several times after her fight with the Griff boy but her will to live is very strong and you needed to be made aware of this before you see her because even with all the medical care and time in the bacta tank her appearance will upset you as I see my news has done. She has lost weight and she has killed another human. You are a warrior, you have been in combat so you will understand what taking a life means but she did not until that moment. I can assure you once she has time to think about this she will need compassion and someone who not only cares about her but comprehends the traumatic experience and all its meanings and implications.”

I acknowledged my understanding in this and we would have spoken more but my comm interrupted letting me know that Palpatine was ready to see me for our arranged debriefing.

“I am at your service Admiral. I believe that you will wish to speak with me further on this matter. Now I believe you should not keep the Emperor waiting.”

He was right and keeping Palpatine waiting is never a good idea.

The meeting with the Emperor meeting was long and difficult and I have never been more grateful for my Chiss training than at that moment nor was I ever more grateful for the forewarning from Taisto. I did not flinch when Palpatine casually brought up the fight and the fact that Merlyn was injured. He seemed to take great delight in giving me some of the messy details as if he were hoping to see a reaction from me but if raising a single eyebrow and casually asking about her status gave him any satisfaction then there is not much I can do about it. He is more than aware of the situation between Vader’s assistant and myself but I do not wish to give him any more ammunition than is necessary. I am already quite certain that he will eventually find a way to use this relationship and my attachment to his tactical advantage I certainly do not need to help him.

The briefing was tediously lengthy and for the most part unnecessary as Palpatine already had most of the information I gave him but again this is one of the ways in which he asserts dominion over those who work for him and I have long since learned that sometimes one must simply play it his way in order to move forward. I do not mind repeating superfluous information but I dislike the wasting of time. It was late by the

time we were through and I considered going home but my desire to see for myself that Merlyn is alive and recovering was stronger.

This is not the first time I have seen her injured or even near death but it is the first time I have seen her looking so broken and so horribly frail. According to Master Taisto she was submerged in bacta for nearly two months and the surgeries required to put her shoulder back together took many hours. The recovery and physical therapy will take even longer and be very painful.

She was sleeping when I arrived at the private medical facility and I did not wish to wake her so I sat by the bed and rested. Most of the bruising has long faded but I read the medical report and truly it is a wonder that she is alive. The strength and sheer will power she has amazes me but I worry now at how killing this boy in such a manner will affect her. She has a remarkably bad habit of not dealing very well with traumatic experiences, bottling the negative emotions deeply with her and withdrawing from the world around her

When she awoke I cannot believe how much relief flooded through me, surprising me with its intensity and even more so when she joked with me. Nearly dying, it seems, does not impair her quirky sense of humour any and I was oddly grateful for this even if I didn't laugh. I recall the feeling of concern I had when she nearly lost her life onboard of my ship due to an allergic reaction and when I compare that with how I feel now I understand how far my own attachment to her has grown.

We spoke a little of what happened and I could see the anguish and the guilt in her face as she talked about Riori Griff. She is not motivated by greed or vengeance and knew nothing of such things yet she has become the center for those who do and the pain it has caused her makes me so very angry, an emotion I thought I dealt with effectively and yet I find in this situation I do not. I am furious that someone deliberately placed her in such a life and death situation. I am too emotionally involved. I wanted to gather her in my arms and take the pain away and when she started to cry the sensation of helplessness grew. What is it about a woman in tears that can reduce a man to this? All I could do was try to be a comfort and I am not certain I succeeded in this. She needs time to heal.

I kept the visit short. She was weak, depressed and in pain. I did not want to add to her current stress instead I remained at her side until she fell asleep and then after consulting with the doctor in charge of her I went to my apartment and slept.

For the next few weeks I will be entrenched in meetings with the Council of Twelve as well as with Palpatine and several of his advisors. This means I shall be busy and have little time to consider my current emotional state as far as Merlyn is concerned. The work I have been doing will come under scrutiny and the endeavours to balance both the vision that Palpatine has of conquering the Unknown Regions with the desire to amass more wealth and knowledge in a manner that does not antagonise those who will eventually come under the Empire's rule is difficult at best.

I understand that underneath much of the superficial reasons given for my role in this there lies the malevolent threat of invasion from a force of beings far superior and far more vicious than most denizens of this galaxy can imagine. As we make slow contingency plans for a possible attack I formulate strategies of my own. It was never my intention to remain under Palpatine's rule forever but rather to stay for as long as being here served my purposes, one of which was protecting my own people, something I cannot do effectively while under Chiss narrow minded constraints. I certainly never

intended to find friends or become emotionally attached to anyone here yet these things have happened and I find that I am not unhappy about it although in some respects such attachments do complicate things slightly. I am certain Palpatine feels that he will eventually use these attachments to his advantage, sometimes he already does although he is careful when it comes to playing this game with me. While he feels he is in control he does not know where my boundaries are nor does he know how far he can push me. So far the jax and rodent games have been civil but I wonder how long that will continue for as he searches for more ways to hold me to his will. What is even more intriguing is the fact that he thinks he can. Unfortunately for him in spite of or perhaps because of all of his power he has not quite figured out that undying loyalty does not come from fear but from respect and in the end respect is earned not coerced. One only has to look in the direction of the rebels who have managed to destroy a great deal of military and strategic targets to see this theory at work. What was thought to be a small group of unhappy troublemakers has turned into a fully blown rebellion and I do not believe they plan on stopping their campaign until they overthrow this government. If that should happen I dread to think of the consequences should this empire fracture and fall especially if such an invasion as we currently speculate upon should happen.

In the mean time I endeavour to keep myself busy because in the small hours of the night when things are quiet and I have time to reflect on things of a more personal nature I find myself thinking about a possible future with someone at my side instead of being alone and while there is much joy in such a possibility there is also fear. I have lost people I care deeply for in the past and these losses have challenged my Chiss sensibilities. I have no wish to experience that level of emotional pain again but of course such a desire is foolish, there is no such thing as life without loss or pain. I am a coward for trying to avoid it by burying myself in my work instead of doing what I really wish to do which is to see if Merlyn is well enough to receive visitors and spend some time in her company assuring myself that she is still alive and well and that her delightful spirit is still intact and not broken by the most recent and unfortunate event.