

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.