

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 who 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.