

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.