

H I H

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Chapter Thirteen

*I have often dreamed
Of a far off place
Where a hero's welcome
Would be waiting for me
Where the crowds will cheer
When they see my face
And a voice keeps saying
This is where I'm meant to be*

*I'll be there someday
I can go the distance
I will find my way
If I can be strong
I know ev'ry mile
Will be worth my while
When I go the distance
I'll be right where I belong*

- Go the Distance, by Michael Bolton

I sat behind the ornate, mahogany desk looking between Mr. Killerguy, and General Huntington. I pressed a button on the electronic reading device, continuing to read the General's report. They caught them.

They caught the bad guys.

The people who wanted my parents... deceased.

"They call themselves *The Ice Cube*. They're an Islamic terrorist group with cells on other member planets. We caught their leader, he is in a very secure location. I think it is called Guantanamo Bay. We're going to transfer him to a discreet Imperial Intelligence location tomorrow." General Meridian was briefing me.

I rubbed my temple a little. "Alright, that's fine. We'll let a local court deal with them. I neither have the time nor patience to do so in the Royal Court. By the way, has anyone seen Peter? I haven't seen him in a few days, and he isn't at the safe house."

Everyone shrugged in response.

I looked at the logo of Imperial Intelligence on the device. It wasn't that much different from the logo of the Empire except for the word *intelligence* in Rigellian, which oddly enough is the same as in Filipino, and the large black circle that represents an eye.

I yawned, "Alright, I'll see everyone tomorrow." I stood from my desk, and everyone else stood as well. I walked around and left the office. I went down the hall to my Dad's suite, and let myself in.

I walked over and sat next to my Dad. I laid down on the sofa, actually. He let me relax my feet in his lap. "Dad, I haven't seen Peter lately. I'm getting really worried. I talked to Captain Shepard earlier, and I'm almost ready to put out an alert."

"Computer, seal the room" my Dad's deep voice commanded.

"Room sealed" replied the feminine voice.

My Dad looked down at me. "Alexander, there is a group that is loyal only to the royal family. They are called the Tal'Shiar. They are a sort of extra-governmental spy agency, assassins, and so forth all in one. They are our eyes and ears independent of the government. They protect us against those who would seek to do us harm. They are only loyal to the royal family."

I looked at my Dad, waiting for him to continue.

"They have a handful of officials that you'll meet eventually, the rest of the group works in cells to protect the whole and the top people. 99% of them have never met each other, or so they think. The person chosen as director always comes from within. They have other day jobs in bakeries, the military, as teachers, and so forth. They meet in secret to protect us and the Empire."



I fidgeted a little, but waited from my spot laid down on the sofa.

“When your Father and I got engaged, I was tested by them, as Peter is now being tested. You couldn’t be told, it’s not allowed. They will test his loyalty to you, and his trust worthiness to the rest of us. If he passes, you will be married. If he fails, you will never see him again.”

I blinked, and started to shake, as if I had shivers. “Wha... what? So he could be... dead?” I started to cry. Why did I have to be the one to get the bad news?

My Dad rubbed my shoulder and kissed me on the head. “No, not at all. You just won’t be allowed to see him if the doesn’t pass. That’s all.”

Office of the Regent

Maple Palace

Rigel Prime



Charley Jeomery
55 Ottawa Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA
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13 May, 2029

Dear Charley,

I am glad you are well again. On Tuesday you and I will be heading to see your father's set. I look forward to attending with you.

Stay well,

Alexander

The set of *Star Trek: Sisko's Revenge* was magnificent. With my entourage flanking me from a reasonable distance, Charley and I got to really look around. Charley's father Brandon introduced us to various cast members. I think my favourite was Avery Brooks who came back to play Captain Benjamin Sisko. But in all, it was fun.

Following the tour we went to the cafeteria at the studio. I had a nice salad, and enjoyed my time with Charley and his Dad.

"So Brandon, now that Charley is better, what are your plans?" I asked.

Brandon smiled. "We're going to go camping sometime soon. I need to spend more time with my son."

I took a bite of my salad. "I'm glad to hear it."

Mr. Killerguy it seems, couldn't spend enough time away from me. He came in and bowed formally. "Your Highness, I apologize but something has come up."

I took a bite of my salad, waiting for my Chief of Staff to continue.

"Count Southtower of the Schne has filed a report."

I blinked. "Lots of people and nobles file reports, Mr. Killerguy. You don't interrupt me for all of them. How do the ranks work anyway?"

Mr. Killerguy pulled out the list and laid it before me:

Pharaoh & Queen - Heads of State "Your Majesty"

Prince & Princess - "Your Highness"

Royal Council/Cabinet: Chancellor - Style "Your High Excellency" & Ministers - "My Lord" .
(All Ministers have the title of Lord. It is genderless at this level.)

Duke & Duchess - Regional rulers, have an advisory council. Style "Your Grace"

Count & Countess - Planetary rulers, "independent" systems such as Earth use the style "Your Excellency" but occasionally use other styles as granted.

Baron & Baroness - Subdivisions of various planets. Style "My Lord".

"Like the rest of our titles, a Count, Duke, and Baron is the one who inherited the title, while a Countess, Duchess and Baroness is the person married to the title holder." Mr. Killerguy explained.

"So Count Southtower is a male or female?" I asked for clarification.

"Male, sir."

I just nodded. "Go on about this report." The metal chair I sat in squeaked a little as I shifted.

"Count Ronan Southtower has a problem on Schne. He thinks that the terrorist cell there may try to overthrow his lawful rule."

I rubbed my eyes a little, and took another bite. "So arrest them?"

"Duke DelMillan thinks Count Southtower might be involved." Mr. Killerguy didn't look impressed.

I hmmed. The report from Imperial Intelligence went into great length about various aspects of the cell. The leader they suspect was a Mohammed something-or-other. I scrunched my nose a little, and looked back up to Mr. Killerguy. "Start one of those undercover operations."

Mr. Killerguy nodded and quickly left, I went back to my salad.

Right as I took a bite of my salad, Charley decided it was an opportune moment to ask a question. "Why did that man not like Count Southtower?"

I blinked and looked at Charley. "I'm sorry?"

"When that man was talking to you, in his... what is it Dad?" Charley looked over to Brandon.

"Body language, Charley."

"Yes. His voice and body language said he didn't like the Count. Perhaps he has something against him?"

I could really do without this job. But I smiled to Charley. "Thank you for the observation."

I finished the tour of the set with Charley and his Dad, and when I got back to my hotel, I made sure a discreet investigation of Mr. Killerguy was carried out... by the Tal'Shiar.

I was finally back home, in the house that I grew up in. I was nursing a big mug of hot chocolate with Peter. After two days, he'd been sent home to me. We cuddled on the couch watching *Harry Potter and the half blood prince* on Blu ray.

"So what was it like?" I asked Peter while his arm was around my shoulders.

Peter hmmed for a moment. "The Tal'Shiar can be ruthless, I understand. But they genuinely want to protect you and the rest of your family. So in that case, they're not so bad. They treated me well, fed me 3 meals a day, and I did have to answer some questions, do a polygraph, etc."

I nodded a little. The scene on the DVD is where Dumbledore is killed by Snape. Harry is underneath the area, listening and seeing what is happening with Dumbledore and the death eaters.

"They said any time we need them, all we have to do is call. The Director was really nice. I suspect he wants to get on my good side."

I hrumphed. "I haven't even met the man yet."

“You will.”

I looked at one report, and then another but frankly none of them were making any sense to me today. It had been 3 days since I ordered the investigation into my Chief of Staff Mr. Killerguy. Surprisingly Charley had been a help.

“I don't get it, Father.” I looked over to my Father, the Pharaoh who had been released from the infirmary and was recuperating.

“What don't you understand, Alexander?”

“What does Mr. Killerguy have against the Count?”

My Father shrugged for a moment. “I don't know, Alexander. But you did the right thing, having him investigated and all.”

I hmm-ed a little. I wasn't sure of that at all. The right thing tends to get muddied up in clouds and grey. Still I looked at the reports. Suddenly I had a longing to go back to school. At least there I wouldn't have to be grown up.

A few days later, when I made it into my office on Earth there was a note. Mr. Killerguy had resigned, and fled. My former Chief of Staff was officially *on the run*. What to do about the Killerguy.

It was late the next Tuesday evening when he was caught. The Tal'Shiar decided that Mr. Killerguy needed to be *debriefed*. So he was tortured, interviewed, and the whole nine yards. The only reason he didn't like the Count is because... the guy's hair is longer.

What a lame reason not to like someone. What a silly reason to lose your job.