

Bright's Winter Wonderland



a SWTOR fic
by brightephemera

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2014-2016

Titles

SWTOR fanfiction

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Drabbles and shorts from our beloved companions from Hutt and Tython to Zakuul, all about winter, giving holidays, and good cheer.

Dedication

It's always the night before Life Day somewhere,
With stockings and holotrees done up with care.

The writers will snuggle all warm in their beds,
They know their creations still dance in our heads.

So with warmest regards, and a cookie or two,
Let's toast kindred spirits, and most of all you.

Acknowledgements

Bright's Winter Wonderland is a non-profit fan made work. Star Wars: The Old Republic and the characters associated with it are the property of BioWare and LucasArts.

Content and Spoilers

No objectionable content unless you hate fun. The final section has spoilers for NPC identities in the Knights of the Fallen Empire expansion.

Dramatis Personae

RHO and LARR GITH, Jedi Knights;
VIVAN TEPH, Jedi Consular;
NIC, Smuggler;
VIERCE SAVINS, Trooper;
NALENNE, RUTH NIRAL, and SEVASHT, Sith Warriors;
ANANZ and NISELLE, Sith Inquisitors;
CALLINE, Bounty Hunter; and
WYNSTON, Imperial Agent

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Jedi Knight



"Ta-da," said Larr Gith.

"You've been waiting all morning to say that," Lord Scourge said evenly. "Haven't you."

The Jedi beamed, her cheeks flushed and damp-flecked, her gold hair flying in wisps in the frigid air. "Yup!"

Lord Scourge stared at the snowman. It was life size, that is, tall enough that Larr must have gotten help or uncharacteristic Force finesse to lift the head on. It was armored in ice, and amidst a profusion of carefully fashioned snow tendrils it was scowling.

Lord Scourge did not grant it the dignity of comparing likenesses. "We could have conquered a small planet in the time it took you to forge that."

"Yeah, but you weren't awake to tell us what planet to conquer. You snooze, you lose."

"Evidently so. I will not make that mistake again."

Larr Gith's amber eyes widened and her smile slipped. "I'm going to regret that, aren't I?"

Lord Scourge spared one more glance for the scowling snow abomination. "I hope so."



“Sooooo,” said Larr Gith, leaning over her cereal.

Lord Scourge finished chewing a many-legged thing that would probably be excused as a delicacy. “Yes, Jedi?”

“Your vision thing. Doesn’t happen that often, right?”

“Very rarely.”

“Hardly ever, really.”

“Is there a point to this?”

“You don’t have visions about anything but saving the galaxy?”

“Correct! Why!?”

“Just making sure you don’t know what I got you for Life Day.” Larr Gith slid off the stool and strutted out. “Later!”



When Kira finally got out of the conference hut it was snowing outside. Jedi and dignitaries streamed around her and Larr Gith on their way to the larger reception house.

Larr stepped out of the main flow of traffic and into the calf-deep snow. “Wow,” she said loudly. “Look at all this going to waste.”

“Something in mind, master?” said Kira.

“What? No. Me? Good behavior. All day. Every day. For days. Complete dignity. Paying serious attention to serious problems in *someone please shoot me now*.”

“No blasters here. Something about security risks. Tell you what, though...” Kira casually stooped. She casually patted something behind her back. She mercilessly whipped the resulting snowball at her Jedi Master’s head.

Larr Gith screeched before she caught herself. “Kira! I’m shocked!” Shocked enough to produce a return snowball about 0.3 seconds later. “How dare yo—oh, bring it!”



Kira stepped back from the oven. "Okay. Seventh time's the charm."

Larr Gith looked up from Kira's sixth attempt at a holiday pie. "Yes, do continue."

Kira looked plaintive. "Are you sure it's not that bad."

"Oh, bad enough to merit another round, sure. Don't mind me. I'm just selflessly helping with the cleanup."

"Yeah, you're a real champion." Kira grabbed a spoon. "Let me at it."

"It's too awful!" yelped Larr Gith, gripping the pie tray. "Let me just get rid of it for you."

"Okay. If I get it right? You will be the last person to get a slice."



"Hey. Boss."

"Doc?"

The Human medic gave Rho an appraising twice-over. "You're tall. Do you think you can secure this tiny and harmless package to the doorway over the entrance to the ship?"

Rho looked at the leaf-and-tinsel bundle in Doc's hands. He looked past him down the ship's hallway. "No. No, I'm afraid I really can't."

Doc let the mistletoe droop. "You, uh, know what that is, then."

"Yes."

Doc stared at him a long moment.

"So was this for me or for Kira?" Rho inquired innocently.

"Bad idea," finished Doc, and scurried away.



“The chestnuts smell so nice.” Larr Gith knelt by the fire, which true to spec was roaring. She was feeling unpleasantly hot, but didn’t want to wilt in front of her companion.

“And they’re going to be delicious,” said Doc. “Just like Mom used to make them.”

They waited in friendly silence.

“So...when are they done?” said Larr Gith.

“Uh, just a couple more minutes,” said Doc.

“You said that a couple of minutes ago.”

“Well we’ve got to be sure they’re done.”

“Tautology much? Have you ever even roasted chestnuts before?”

Doc looked shifty. “I heard a song about it once. Okay? It sounded romantic.”

“I’m putting that on your gravestone.”

Doc went from shifty to offended. “Many, many years from now.”



Sergeant Rusk stood at ease, monitoring the chill evening. Behind him he heard the busy sounds of laid-back socialization, the sort of comfortable hum the Jedi Knight seemed to encourage.

He started when said Jedi Knight appeared at his elbow. “Won’t you come inside?” said Rho.

"Someone should watch," said Rusk. "That duty doesn't go away, Master Jedi."

"We're safe here. And if you're going to stay out here in the cold then so am I."

"Don't do that, Master Jedi."

“Too late. I brought drinks.” Rho raised his arm to reveal two mugs of steaming, spiced liquid. “And...I might have told people that it’s a good night to be under the stars.”

Kira emerged, chatting animatedly with a Sentinel they had met earlier that week. Suddenly three or four people followed them. Warmth and light and chatter flooded the porch.

And, Rusk determined out of the corner of his eye, Rho was smiling.



Rusk resisted the urge to speak until it strengthened to an imperative. “Master Jedi...”

“Hm?” Larr Gith was flipping through the holo catalogue of something risqué-looking and holiday-themed. He tried not to notice it.

“I don’t mean to criticize, Master Jedi.”

“So don’t,” she said gaily. “Hey, do you think the red here is actually what it looks like, or is that just holofuzz?”

“Master Jedi, we’re here to stand guard.”

“And I am,” said Larr Gith. “Any intruder who sees us will be irresistibly drawn to monologue at me. We beat him up, everything’s fine.”

“You’re distracted.”

“You’re not. Fifty percent of us working, that’s not bad, and I am making *great* progress on my gift list.” She looked up, seeming genuinely puzzled. “Is this not how you stand guard?”



Jedi = problem

Larr Gith turned up her nose. “It wasn’t me.”

T7-01 = found list // list purpose = ??? // secrets = trouble

Larr Gith peered down at her loyal astromech. “I feel vaguely like I should be guilty,” she said, “but I’m not sure why. How do you do that?”

T7-01 brought up a display. A short list of names, surrounded and punctuated by question marks.

T7-01 = on list // T7-01 = in trouble?

“No! No, not even a little bit! That’s my shopping list, Teeseven. Those are the people I haven’t been able to find Life Day presents for. You’re just on because I

haven't found you anything yet. I mean really. What do you get for the droid who has everything?"

T7 = no more secret lists

She arched her eyebrows. "Well, that was easy. Done."



Today = Life Day! Today = Life Day!

"Ungh."

Today = Life Day! // Today = Life Day!

Larr Gith shoved an armload of hair away from her drool-sticky mouth. "Ungh," she repeated plaintively. "It's three in the morning."

Today = Life Day! // Today = Life Day!

"I know you don't *sleep*, but you could at least have the..."

T7 = got Jedi hero present // Today = Life Day!

Larr Gith bolted upright. "Lead on."



Sith Warrior



“You were saying?” Vette said sweetly.

The cold air sped up to a whipping mania while she leaned forward on the sled. Behind her Ananz clutched her waist and growled something that was obviously going to be another complaint about how not sure about this he was.

The mountain slope stretched luminous before them, and the sled was reaching top speed.

Vette kept the controls, angling them towards the breaks in trees. Sparse underbrush hissed with their passing. When she saw an upcoming jump she leaned them over into it, and Ananz’s arms tightened convulsively around her when the sled leaped from ground to flight.

They landed with a slam and kept racing. Ananz’s breath tickled her ear. “You liked that?” he said.

Vette tried for a cool agreement and managed a squeak.

“Very well.” Behind her Ananz shifted, and she felt something at the edge of comprehension. Suddenly the sled bucked again, this time racing up an invisible obstacle. She felt the moment when the nothingness beneath them melted and left them in free fall.

“AAAAAAHHHHHH,” she said casually, and knew that if he had breath to laugh he’d be laughing. As it was, he clung to her, she clung to the controls, and Force only knew where the two of them would end up.



“Okay, Vette. Since you insist on not liking the Scarlet Nexu merchandise I gave you the last...”

“...last every single year we’ve been together?” said Vette. “But who’s counting?”

“I got something else. I ordered it complete with original security.” Nalenne gestured grandly at the building behind her. “All you have to do is go pick it up.”

“Surveillance cameras,” said Vette. “Motion sensors, probably IR scanners. Bioscans for sure. Guards inside, tossup between meat and droid – different tactics to get through them. And the inner chamber? Anybody’s guess. If I can even get inside the lock.”

“So do all that and it’s yours!” Nalenne said brightly.

“Aw,” said Vette. “You really do care.” And she jumped to hug the Sith.

“Wrong way!” yelped Nalenne. “Wrong way! Present is that way!” But she hugged her back a little bit.



“Got that?” called Nalenne.

In the midst of a forest of shopping bags and carefully stacked wrapped packages, Malavai Quinn nodded. “Yes, my lord. Everything is quite secure.”

“Good, because I’m not done yet. List: For Niselle: Something small and pointy that’s easy to step on by accident.” Nalenne tossed a small box atop the heap and towed her walking merchandise tree back out into the mall concourse.

Quinn spoke up. “Incoming holo, my lord. From Lady Grathan.”

“You can handle that,” Nalenne yelled over the mountain of goods between them. “Right?”

“My lord, I’m not equipped with *quite* enough arms for all operations at once...”

“List: For Quinn: Extra cybernetic arm. Consider it done.”

A pause. “You are joking, my lord?”

“Depends. I’m weighing ‘a hundred and fifty per cent as useful’ against ‘sticks out like an additional sore thumb at dinner parties.’”

“That is...certainly a decision-making process, my lord.”

“Just imagining the look on your face right now...well, I’ll decide if we run into any surgeons between here and the parking lot. Onward!”



Quinn was a safe distance from the party. The rambling estate had a patio currently being misted with a chill rain. He sniffed his mug of cider, again reassuring himself that it wasn’t spiked, and returned to his vigil. If his lord needed him, he would be there.

“Quinn?” he turned his head and there she was. “Only a couple more hours.”

“Understood, my lord.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t get out of all of these.” Ruth Niral smiled at him, a little ruefully. “I told the guests that I insisted you patrol out here. The Kaas ladies’ auxiliary was crushed.”

He had seen them when he had trailed her into the gathering: an array of slender, provocatively dressed women with eyes like talons. “Thank you.”

“And some more cider,” she said, firmly exchanging his cooling mug for a hot one. “Anything else I can do?”

“Impress them. Outmaneuver them. Carry the day.” He smiled. “The usual things.”



-frame: Outside a comfortable house, a fresh thick layer of snow. Sevasht looks around the snowy driveway.-

Sevasht: Broonmark?

Sevasht: Vette said you were out playing. In the snow. Which I don’t actually believe until I see it.

-frame: Sevasht looks around the uninterrupted snowscape.-

Sevasht: Broonmark?

-frame: Broonmark surging out of the snow from two inches to Sevasht’s left, grabbing a splay-limbed and horrified Sevasht in a Talz hug.-

Sevasht: THAT IS NOT PLAYING

Broonmark, *still hugging*: No KILL today. <3



Quinn appeared at Nalenne's side with a frown. "My lord, someone has spiked the egg nog again."

"It started out spiked, Quinn."

"I know. I believe the substance this time was a hallucinogen."

"Hilarity!"

"Or overdose, my lord." Quinn pointed through the party. "As per usual, Broonmark has claimed the bowl."

Nalenne pushed her way through to the corner. Her giant Talz friend was seated in the corner. His proboscis was sunk deep in the nearly-empty nog bowl.

"Whoa. Broonmark." He looked genuinely soused, and not the nice kind. "You want to ease up?"

"We can smell colors," reported Broonmark, and lowered his proboscis into the bowl again.



Knock, knock.

"Go away."

Pierce pushed the door open and carried the tray in. He dropped it on top of the mess of reports on Ruth's desk.

Ruth scowled up at him.

"Gingerbread cookies," he said. "They've been taste tested. Extensively." He paused to burp. "They're safe."

Ruth looked at the cookies. She looked at Pierce.

"With well wishes from the staff," he added.

"You," she said, lip trembling with the effort of a non-smile, "really know how to ruin a perfectly good bad mood."

He grinned. "Yes, milord."



Pierce had a vibroknife. He was carving details into a heavy-class auto cannon made of ice. He took one critical look, turning it over, then leaned it alongside several companions on a gun rack made of snow.

Quinn approached and frowned. “Is this what you’ve been up to since we were grounded?”

“Yep.”

“Is it an artwork or a wish list?”

“Both.” Pierce grinned. “’Tis the season, mate.”



“What is this?” said Nalenne.

“It’s a Life Day tree,” said Jaesa. “Holographic, so no maintenance.”

“What is a Life Day tree doing in my Dromund Kaas fortress of Sithitude?”

“Making the place a little livelier.”

“How am I supposed to intimidate people when there’s bright colors and glowy lights everywhere?”

Jaesa shrugged innocently. “Intimidate them with good cheer?”

“Jaesa, I love you, but you are an *awful* Sith apprentice.”



Nalenne physically blocked her apprentice’s path. “Jaesa! A day off so close to Life Day, and not with us?”

“I have some errands, master.”

“Errands like sneaking off to have a Light Side Sith Life Day Party? Way too long a name, you need to pick a better one. LSSLDP doesn’t exactly roll off the tongue.”

Jaesa looked a little green. “Was it that obvious?”

“Two can play at the true-vision thing, missy.” Nalenne reached into her pocket and produced a little prism of an ornament stamped with the comic book figure Scarlet Nexu. “Here, hang this somewhere.” She smiled, with teeth. “Just so they all remember me.”



Outside the incongruous Hoth corral stood an ice cat. It was harnessed to an open sleigh. Jaesa sat beside Sevasht, resplendent in goth robes. He stuck to his puffy coat.

The driver flourished his whip. “Welcome to our brand-new completely unique sleigh circuit!”

“Are these cats safe?” said Sevasht.

“Oh, definitely!”

The driver sent the whip snapping over the harnessed beast’s head. It reacted by spinning, severing its harness in two claw swipes, and leaping to bear the driver to the ground.

“Agh!” said Sevasht, struggling with his puffy coat.

“Baahahahaha!” said Jaesa, clapping.

“Stop it!” yelled Sevasht.

“Fine,” said Jaesa, and flourished her saber, and soared, alighting beside the cat, which looked up from the thoroughly dead driver. “Cutie, aren’tcha?” she said, and made it one shot.

“I wanted a normal thing,” said Sevasht. “One. Normal. Thing.”

“Want to try another one?”

“No.”

Smuggler

“Captain? What are you doing?”

Nic curled sideways out from under the Life Day tree in the common room.

“Rigging up the lights. Gotta have all the wiring done before we start stuffing presents under.”

“Presents,” said Guss. “Right.” He hadn’t been shopping. “This is Life Day, right? The Human holiday?”

“Aw. Mon Cals don’t celebrate Life Day?”

“Oh, yes! I mean, no! I mean, we do, but where I’m from, the, uh, youngest person on the ship receives all the presents, and, er. Would you believe I only hatched seventeen years ago?”

For about half a second he could hope that she bought it. Then her trademark grin twinkled up. “Slick, Guss. Get over here and help me decorate.”



“Captain! Captain!”

“Uh, Guss, Guss?” Nic tilted her head. “You’re undercover.”

“I’m a Jedi!” he said, flapping musty brown robes. “It’s the perfect costume!”

“And why are you in costume?”

“Because it’s Life Day!”

There was a moment’s tactful silence.

“Life Day isn’t a costume holiday, is it,” Guss said glumly.

“Kid, it is if you want it to be.” Nic punched his arm. “You look great.”



“Captain, there’s...something I’ve got to say.”

Nic looked up from her stockings full of ill-gotten gains. “What is it, Corso?”

The youth was studying his hanging hands. “I had a present for you. I was making one. Restoring a classic...well, the details don’t matter so much. A blaster. I just didn’t have time to finish her,” he said lamely.

Nic dipped her chin and waited until Corso raised his guilty eyes to her. “Are you saying,” she said slowly, “that there’s a half-done blaster restoration project with my name on it? Because a girl doesn’t get nearly as many of those as you might expect.”

“Captain,” he said, visibly torn. “You want it?”

“I really do. You’ll have to show me what progress you made already.”

His whole face burst into sunshine. “I will! Happy Life Day, Captain!”



“The Blastech...wait, this isn’t the catalogue.” Corso unfolded and unfolded his Life Day gift into a large poster. On it, the best of Blastech’s history showed in an infographic evenly split between tiny text and big guns. “This is nice!” He squinted. “Wait, that’s wrong. That model didn’t show up until after the Treaty of Coruscant.”

Nic leaned over and handed him a bold pen.

Corso took it and eyed her suspiciously. “You knew this would happen!”

“Few more mistakes to go.” Nic grinned. “Have at it, farmboy.”



"My apologies, master," said the upside-down golden droid, "the weather was just too much for my circuits!"

"C2-N2 wasn't made for outdoors," Bowdaar understated, dropping the droid on the freshly-damp floor.

"Bowdaaaaar!" Nic pelted down the hallway and threw herself in a hug aimed equally at the snow-encrusted Wookiee and the large bag in his other arm. "You made it! You got the presents! You saved Life Day!" She squeezed. "I don't even care that you smell like wet Wookiee."

"And I don't care that you smell like dry Human," said Bowdaar, half hugging her back. "Did you save any food?"



The discreetly located landing pad had a lot of space to spare. Nic lay in the calf-deep snow, relaxing. A few meters away Bowdaar was lowering himself into the snow as well.

"Arms out," instructed Nic. "Now wave your arms and legs, like this."

"I know how to make snow *rruahra*," grumbled Bowdaar, and moved. Both of them stood and hopped out of the fresh snow figures.

Nic looked at the sheer scale of the snow angel Bowdaar had just made next to the one her short frame had managed. "Showoff," she said.

Bowdaar knocked a solid chunk of pressed snow free from his arm hair. One of many. "If it helps, you will dry off a lot faster than I will."



It was snowing outside, and Akaavi was in the yard, practicing.

She took her techstaff through a series of whirling motions, striking here and there at imaginary foes. She stepped, pivoted, took a new angle of attack, every movement muffled by the gently falling snow.

Nic followed along as best a complete non-combat-kind-of-person could. Then, when she had judged Akaavi had probably had enough of being by herself, she patted together one big snowball, stepped forward, and hurled it.

In a perfectly natural continuation of her motion Akaavi turned, swung her techstaff up, and intercepted the missile, scattering it in all directions. She whirled

down to a guard and met Nic's eye. After a second's pause she smiled. "Even your snowballs are noisy."



Akaavi barreled out of the cargo bay, brandishing her electrostaff. Corso yelped and jumped back to the opposite wall.

Akaavi swung. "Defend yourself!"

"Are you crazy? I just need the -"

She stepped closer, setting her staff on the wall over his shoulder. "Prove your worthiness."

"Worthiness to what?" Corso whined, twisting his head away from the offending weapon.

Akaavi pointed up. A sparkling bundle of mistletoe hung in the cargo bay doorway. "I am giving you the chance to prove your worthiness to kiss under the mistletoe."

"That's not how that works!"

Akaavi scoffed. "It would be if it were Mandalorian."



"Hsst! Vette!"

"Risha? What are..?"

"It's Life Day, silly! We need to sort the presents!"

"What? It's..."

"Three oh two in the morning. I let you sleep in this year."

"We haven't done this since we were kids."

"Time to start again! Quick, before anybody else wakes up!"



“Nic, you got me nothing for Life Day?” Risha looked up from the empty box, more bewildered than annoyed.

“On the contrary! I got you a planet,” Nic said smoothly.

“A planet?” said Risha.

“You know, in case you get sick of Dubrillion. Any time between March 1 and March 14, this baby is yours.”

“You bought a timeshare *planet*?”

“Like I said. One planet gets boring, I’m sure.”

“You may be crazy, but at least you’re sort of nice.”

“Please put that on the next character reference I’m court ordered to produce. I’m flattered.”

Imperial Agent



The ship's door burst open. "Sir!" announced Raina Temple.

Wynston settled his jacket more securely over his shoulders. "Close that, Ensign."

"Sir? It's twenty degrees below freezing out there."

"Yes, that's rather the point."

She smiled slyly. "You're a Chiss. This should be like your mother's arms."

"I vacated my mother's arms several years back. I have no particular desire to relapse." He shivered. "Close the door or there *will* be disciplinary action."

She pouted. "Fine." She slipped the rest of the way in and shut the door against the icy wind. "If you're not coming out, sir, may I recommend something warm to drink?"

"Now you're speaking my language." He took the lead toward the galley. Let it never be said that he didn't appreciate *something* about winter weather.



"Sir?"

Wynston, bundled up in coat and gloves, looked up from the open panel. "Yes?"

"The heat is out until relief comes. Under the circumstances, I thought I would provide your Life Day present early." She offered a flat package.

Wynston stood and took it. He ran a finger around to the edge and pulled carefully around it, tugging and sliding the untorn packaging away. Which left him holding a dark red scarf, tessellated with what looked like interrogation probes.

He pulled it snug around his neck. "Temple," he said, stroking the soft cloth with both thumbs, "I'm putting you in for a Medal of Honor."

Temple smiled, a little uncertainly.

Wynston noticed. “Oh, get over here.” And, for once unguarded or at least desperate for heat, he pulled her into a tight hug. Temple buried her nose in the scarf at his neck. It was just right.



Doctor Lokin surreptitiously checked the small mirror when he heard someone at the door. Ah. Wynston. Drifted away from the party in the ship’s mess, then.

“Lokin,” said the Chiss. “Don’t tell me you’re not having fun.”

“Oh, I am.” Lokin beckoned and moved over to allow a view of his lab bench. “I succeeded in getting a sample from the punch bowl immediately after Kaliyo endeavored to spike it. Which would be immediately before you swapped it out for a fresh bowl.”

Wynston eyed the chemilyzer readout. “So? Did she use the cheap stuff again?”

“I believe she used a caustic compound not actually authorized for use as a food product in civilized space,” said Lokin. “I think she’s getting impatient about the fact that her modifications never stay.”

“I asked Vector to switch in a third bowl after she tampered with tonight’s second one. She thinks I can get bored of this.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time she’s underestimated you.”

“And it won’t be the last. The night is young.” Wynston smiled crookedly. “Do send me the writeup on whatever that substance was. Kaliyo teaches me more advanced chemistry than Intelligence ever did.”



Eckard Lokin turned away from the window, leaving a single flickering light on the sill.

Wynston looked around the hotel room, then at the gusty window. “Lights for the season? How unusually sentimental.”

“This particular light is modified to emit the wavelength used for signaling of the rare dispetto moth. I require several samples for study.”

“Yes.” Wynston nodded as if relieved. “Yes, that’s like you.”

Lokin shook his head, smiling either to himself or very patronizingly. “Come now. Can’t it be both?”



“I am an adaptive entity designed to iteratively upgrade intelligence and learning algorithms. I am beyond your comprehension.”

Wynston nodded as if this was a normal thing to say in conversation, which admittedly, with SCORPIO, it was. “That doesn’t answer my question.”

“No, I do not know what I want for Life Day,” SCORPIO said sullenly. “My requirements do not hinge on such an arbitrary time window.”



The voice filled Wynston's room, cool and malevolent.

“Millennia of glacial development littered with inadequate gestures. And here at what you call the height of your species’ sophistication, you still only know how to substitute bribes for intimacy. After all those chemical methods to ensure loyalty, methods you disdain...will your friends be less likely to turn on you if you find them the right trinket?” A dramatic pause, a silkier tone. “Happy Life Day.”

Wynston didn't look up from his reading. “SCORPIO,” he said, “get out of the main computer.”



Wynston found Vector in the cargo bay. The Joiner’s head was bowed and his hands together.

He straightened. “Wynston. The Dance of Unlighting has just finished.” A pause. “We...have always made a point of being home for the holidays.”

Home with the nest, instead of out here chasing shadows on an assignment he’d never asked for. “I’m sorry,” said Wynston.

“Why?” Vector’s smile was small but unmistakable. “We are already here.”



Wynston read the card, twice, and smiled. "I see you're in the 'happy holidays' camp of Life Day," he said to Vector.

Vector looked thoughtful. "It seems more appropriate. After all, around this time of year the various Killiks celebrate Kawaanz, Horonikah, Yulo, Festinus, Onvoktus, Bechstolog, Sottornalia, Ordoquan, Malalanka, Loosar, and twelve colonized Solstices and New Years."

"Tell me something," said Wynston. "Do you personally celebrate all of those?"

"Sooner or later a nest does, though not always ours. Our diaspora spread far," Vector said mildly. "We have much to celebrate."



"Kaliyo, they don't have strip clubs on Rattatak."

"Huh. How'd you guess?"

"Call it intuition."

"Still. If they did, it'd be traditional to go visit them on Life Day Eve."

"They don't have Life Day on Rattatak, either."

"You're missing the point," she huffed.

"The point being that you're bored and want to go to a strip club?"

"Well, yeah. We need to take Bugboy. Call it a cultural experience."

It was possible, though difficult to tell through the Chiss red, that Wynston was rolling his eyes. "With an offer like that, how can I refuse? Do we bring SCORPIO, too?"

"Do you want to see her practicing her pole dancing in the engine room?"

"All right, maybe not."



Kaliyo staggered into the common room and swiped a bunch of plastoid cups off the table in an act of random aggression. She nearly ran into Wynston before achieving a bleary focus. “So it’s possible to overdose on egg nog,” she said hoarsely.

“Ah, the alluring scent of vomit,” said the Chiss, brushing a puff of decorative fluff off her piercing.

She shook him away. “Oh, screw off.”

“No, no! This is my sympathetic face,” Wynston said innocently.

“Laugh it up, blue-balls.” Kaliyo turned around. “I’ll be in the refresher.”

Jedi Consular



Nalenne came running when the Force burst flattened the "Get Your Gifts Here" signing table on the Comic-Con floor.

At the center of the burst stood a tiny alien girl with oddly trendy blue face markings. She stood clutching an unlit lightsaber – and, in her other hand, a shrink-wrapped special edition Lantern Ladies Omnibus.

"I got there first," she told a stunned-looking man sitting on the floor, staring up at her. "Ohh, I really shouldn't have done that..."

"Problem?" said Nalenne, drawing her own lightsaber. "Please say yes."

The alien girl looked her over. "Emperor's Wrath, right? Uh...gotta go!"

And in a second burst of energy, the little aggressor – and her special edition omnibus – was gone.



The snow had gotten the better of the landing pad. Master Vivan's ship was covered in two feet or more of dense powder.

"Ugh," said Vivan. "I'll get the shovel and find Qyzen."

"Why?" said Nadia. She faced the ship and meditated briefly, then thrust one hand out palm-first. A line of snow split as before a shot of wind, the remnants flying off to either side and off the ship.

"We don't use the Force lightly..." said Vivan.

"Tell that to Qyzen Fess in subzero temperatures," said Nadia. "Come on, try it!"

So Vivan did. And it was great.



"Havoc Squad!"

The huge man whirled and took in Felix with a glance, his burned face smiling. "Wait a minute," he said. "Special assignment to the Jedi Council. I've seen you in the vids!"

"Wasn't expecting to be famous," said Felix, startled.

"Yeah, that can sneak up on you." Havoc Squad's CO cast a look around at the Army's chaotic holiday party. "Listen, this is great. I always said I'd buy you a drink for Balmorra."

"Balmorra? I didn't get involved there until after she cleared the place out. I was only really there to help put things back together."

"My point exactly. Spec Forces doesn't always get to put things back together, not unless we fight for it. Sounds like you and your Jedi do nothing but the hard stuff. The cleanup."

"Just doing my job, Major. Same as you."

"Well. The difference is, I'd feel weird buying me a drink for it. Come on."



"Ilum won't win any tourism awards," said Iresso. "Still, we can manage. Hey, Master Jedi, if you want we can go skiing."

"Skiing? Where you strap sticks to your feet and slide downhill? That sounds weirdly fun." Vivan Teph leaned back, eyeing Iresso critically. "Where does a career soldier learn to ski?"

Iresso grinned. "I was stationed on Hoth for two years. A guy learns eventually."



"Tharan? Dear?"

"Yes, Holiday? What is it?"

"You didn't even notice, did you?"

Tharan Cedrax looked up from his lab apparatus. "Notice what?"

Holiday spread her arms. “It’s Life Day!”

“It is? It is! How wonderful! If I tap into the Virat Supercluster for extra processing cycles today nobody’s going to notice...oh, I’d better sort out what tasks need computing first...”

“Of course,” Holiday said, a little glumly. “Let me just sort out what projects have the most computationally intensive aspects.”

“Nono, don’t go anywhere yet.”

“Oh?”

Tharan pushed away from the desk and faced the hologram full on. “Happy holiday, Holiday.”

Holiday beamed. “You, too. And a very happy New Year.”



“Vivan,” called Tharan, “I could use your particular talents if you have a moment.”

Vivan stepped into his workshop. “What is it?”

“Just this. I need to affix this to the ceiling.” In her Force vision she sensed a severed plant piece with one flat side. “Could you do the honors?”

“Of course.” Vivan cupped the package with the Force and raised it to the ceiling.

“Ah, no, closer. Here. Step toward me.” Tharan took hold of her arms. “Right above here.”

Vivan pushed the flat side snug. Something sparked. A conduit next to the plant burst, knocking it to the ground in a puff of savory smoke.

Tharan jumped, and Holiday appeared in a cloud of sparks to Vivan’s vision.

“Tharan,” she said. “I think that’s enough decorating.”

“I can explain,” Tharan said in a barely calm voice.

“Oh,” said Vivan, looking at the fallen plant. “So that’s mistletoe?”



Zenith sat alone. The bar was deserted, not unexpected for Life Day. He laid out strategies in his head while he nursed his drink. It was good to be back on Balmorra, even outside any official capacity.

The bartender tapped the bar in front of him and pushed him a tall drink of something that looked creamy and lightly spiced and extremely bad for his arteries. There was a note under the glass: You don't know me, but thanks for everything you've done. Happy Life Day.

Zenith looked around. The bar was deserted.

He cast a suspicious look at the bartender, who shrugged. "Just missed him." His eyes flickered to the note. "Not that I disagree. Everyone knows you around here."

Suspending his natural caution for two seconds, Zenith pulled the drink in and tasted it. It wasn't bad. Not bad at all.



Zenith spoke out of the shadows in the hallway. Vivan, tipsy, yelped.

"Shh," said Zenith. He was looking over her shoulder at the common room where the others were still exclaiming over their Life Day presents. "Got you something," said Zenith, and held out a dinner-plate-sized box.

She opened it. There on a grey velvet backing were...chain links. Some fine, some thumb-thick, all fitted each to the next, but all cut open.

"That one's from Balmorra," Zenith said, pointing. "That's Makeb."

"Zenith, what..."

"One from every planet you've freed." He gauged her expression, whatever she was showing in her surprise, and went on. "That's not the kind of thing you forget."

Vivan had a lump in her throat. "Zenith, it's perfect."

"I'll find another link for you the next time we head out," he said. "Probably."

“Is it arrogant to say I hope you will?”

Zenith just smiled.



“Will the Herald like the preserved sleen tail? Or the rancor-tooth necklace?”

“Qyzen...” said Iresso.

“Or the gundark-ear trophy? That was a great hunt.”

“Do you have any gift ideas that weren’t taken from a dead animal?”

Qyzen Fess blinked. “No. Why?”



“Wait a minute,” said Vivan Teph. “You sing?”

Qyzen Fess jumped and whirled. “Not really,” he said.

“I heard you! It was beautiful! Come caroling with us.”

Qyzen Fess cringed. “I can’t.”

“Do it again. Sing.”

Qyzen made an oddly pleasing monotone noise.

“Perfect! We need a bass. Come with me!” She grabbed his claw. “Please?”

Qyzen slumped, hopeless. “Only because you are the Herald.”

Sith Inquisitor



“So this holiday is about giving me presents.”

“Lord?” Xalek said attentively.

“That’s really about it. We have a lot of food and drinking and then people, such as you, give people, such as me, presents.”

Xalek contemplated this. “Lord. Tell me your will so I may—”

“No, not services like you do the rest of the time as your full-time job. Presents. Something I like. Preferably something in a box. Big. With lots of ribbons. You’re a sharp study, you’ll figure it out.”

Ten minutes later something shattered in a distant room. When the two competing bellows sounded, Niselle sauntered down the hall to see what was going on.

Blaster fire. Deflection off a lightsaber. When Niselle reached the doorway she found Xalek standing at guard next to a half-assembled mass of cardboard while Andronikos, an odd amalgamation of ribbons stuck to the side of his head, had both blasters ready. Before Niselle could speak Andronikos snarled and yelled “I am NOT getting in your BOX!”

“Lord,” said Xalek, and pointed at Andronikos. “Your present is uncooperative.”

“Oh.” Niselle bit her lip. “Oh.” She laughed. “Xalek, my dear minion, that’s really not news.”



“Xalek, what is that noise?”

Xalek stayed in the corner, almost behind the Life Day tree. He kicked the big crate at his feet. “Silence,” he commanded.

“Okay, secrecy time is over, giving me things time has begun.” Niselle folded her arms over her chest. “Now what is that?”

Xalek tugged a rope and the front panel of the crate slid open. A skinny man in grey rags tumbled out. He looked up, wild-eyed, and started an anemic draggle of Force lightning at Niselle.

Xalek growled. "I brought you an apprentice, lord."

The supposed apprentice stopped. "Wait, that fiend has a master?"

"He does," said Niselle. "One brighter than you, I might add."

The apprentice's eyes rolled back. He fell like a bag of rocks.

"Hm," said Niselle. "Well, maybe he knows how to scrub floors."



"Oh!" said Talos, pulling the golden wrapping away. "It's...a...."

Ananz watched him, grinning.

"...a puzzle box?" said Talos, turning the ornate dark cube over in his hands. "It feels like a quite solid figure. It looks like these grooves here might, yes, I see, but – what's inside?"

"I can't tell you," Ananz said, "obviously."

"Ah," said Talos, smiling, "but is the present inside, or is the present the chance to figure it out?"

Ananz gestured triumphantly. "That would be telling."

"Very well! I shall have to thank you after I've figured out what I'm thanking you for."

"And that, good sir, is exactly the way things should be."



Niselle ripped the wrapping paper off, sending shreds flying. What she ended up with was a smallish metal ring surrounded by eight-inch rays of some aged-looking metal.

“Great!” said Niselle. “What is it?”

“An ancient treasure from Kalee,” said Talos. “Priceless, really. I thought it might go in your private collection. If you don’t mind my demonstrating...” He was smiling, but he was also wrapping padding around his forearm. He took the item from her hands and passed his hand through the inner ring.

At once the rays snapped around his forearm, digging into the padding. “Classic artifact trap,” Talos said happily. “It can only be released by the Force. Perfect for keeping an intruder around until the master comes home to deal with him.”

“Neat!” said Niselle. “I know a lot of people who would benefit from having their arms chewed off by angry artifacts.”

“Ah. My lord?”

“Yeah?”

He was eyeing the small tears that the ray tips were eating in his protection. “Could you perhaps release this one? In the very near future?”

“Right! I’ll do that.”



Niselle knelt. The Dark Side swept in dark waves around her.

Ashara knelt. Her brow furrowed in concentration.

“I sense your frustration, apprentice,” murmured Niselle, with a sly unpleasant smile.

“Quiet!” said Ashara. “I’m going to get this!”

“You’ll never guess,” said Niselle.

“I will too! Just open your mind? A teensy bit? Or maybe just tell me what you got me?”

“You’ll have to wait until Life Day.”

“Nuh-uh! I have to know before then!”

“Oh, try. It’s good for you.”



Ananz made his way back to the front of the jointly built snowman. Ashara was busying herself with robe folds on the other side.

Ananz dug in with his gloves and sheared the breasts off the figure.

“Whoa, what are you doing?” said Ashara.

“Revan was a man,” said Ananz.

“We don’t have complete enough records to know that for sure,” fumed Ashara.

“Revan could’ve been female.”

“We met him. We stopped his evil plan.”

“Stopped someone’s evil plan.”

“I just think you’re still in denial about this.”

Ashara scooped up one big snowball. She patted it. And, her gaze never wavering, she mashed it back onto the snow figure’s chest. “Got another one where that came from,” she spat.



"Master! Master! Andronikos requested that I deliver any incoming package directly to him without telling you, so I-"

"I heard that!" yelled Andronikos.

Seconds later he came pelting around the corner. As 2V-R8 reached out to hand Niselle the little brown package, Andronikos dove and intercepted.

"Twovee," he grated, "one of these days I'm going to redecorate your stupid droid face with your stupid droid intestines."

"I don't have intestines," said 2V-R8.

"Shut up."

"Andronikos," said Niselle. "What is that?"

Andronikos stood and dusted off his knees. "Nothing."

"It's a present for me. Isn't it."

"No."

"Can I see what it is?"

"No."

"It's my ship. It stands to reason I'm entitled to things in it."

"No. Wait until Life Day."

"Give it to me now."

"No."

"I command you to give me that package."

Andronikos tucked in his chin and glared at her. For a long time.

Niselle groaned. "Fine. I was going to wait anyway." And, while Andronikos continued to glare, she flounced away.



"What would you do if I got you a bloodthirsty pirate fleet for Life Day?"

Andronikos considered. "Make a bloody incursion into Republic space. Booty for all."

"Ooh."

"Why do you ask?"

"No reason." Niselle smiled, not pleasantly. "No reason at all."

"You're just getting my hopes up so you can laugh when it turns out you gave me socks."

“Andronikos, you wound me.”

“Because I’m right.”

Niselle scowled. “Back to the drawing board, then.”



“Little Sith. You are wearing a silly hat.”

“It’s a Life Day hat!” said Niselle. “It’s festive.”

“It is beneath your dignity,” growled Khem Val.

“I dictate my dignity,” said Niselle. “I suppose Tulak Hord was too cool for Life Day, hmm?”

“Tulak Hord loved Life Day, including hats,” grumbled Khem Val. “It was foolish then too.”



“The victories of Yn and Chabosh did not require this much bunting,” grumbled Khem Val.

“That’s nice,” said Niselle, and tucked another tinsel garland into the door frame.

The next sound to emerge from Khem Val was much different: high and melodious, and in Basic as fluent as could be managed through Khem Val lips.

“Oh, I so fondly remember Life Day. I would decorate the office and give cursed artifacts to all my apprentices.”

“Yes, I remember,” said Niselle. “I did eventually recover feeling in that toe.”

“It’s just no good with your monster around,” sighed Lord Zash. “I can’t even wear the hat anymore.”

Niselle considered. She looked up Khem Val’s full height. She calculated her opinion of her former master. “Good luck with that,” she concluded. “Now come help me with the ornaments.”



Republic Trooper



Jorgan kept half an eye on his CO while he used his claws in one fine circular motion to unwrap his gift. He held the result up in his fingertips, and stared at it.

“It’s a...firing chamber,” he said.

“For a NovaCorp X67-series ion striker. Should fit, for instance, that Rioter you keep in your quarters.”

Jorgan looked from his CO to the blaster component and back. “Savins, these have been discontinued for years.”

“I know a guy who knows a guy. Will it help?”

“Yes. Yes, it will. This is great, I can’t believe you...”

Savins cracked a grin. “I was going to get you a Blastech catalogue to replace the one you’re always sleeping with, but I figured I’d go bigger this year.”

"Oh, har har."

“Happy Life Day, Jorgan.”



Jorgan was standing on the bridge, looking out at the stars.

Vierce knocked on the doorframe. “You’re thoughtful again,” he said. “Always around this time of year.”

“Thinking about my littermates,” said Jorgan. “We don’t get together this time of year anymore.”

“Send ‘em holiday cards,” said Vierce. “I can pick out some best-of holos of you to send.”

“We don’t need to get into that,” Jorgan said hastily. “Though, a letter might not be a bad idea.”

“Seriously. Need embarrassing pictures? I’m your man.”

“As your XO, it’s my professional opinion that you should stop talking now.”

Vierce grinned. But he did shut up.



“What are those?”

“Socks.” Vierce bent down opposite Elara and proffered the heavy woolen bundle.

“I’m already wearing socks.”

“You’ll want more of them. Warmth aside, ankle support is the name of the game when you’re skating.”

“If I put all that on where is my ankle going to fit?”

“It squishes pretty well. Trust me.”

Skeptically she accepted his offering and rolled the socks up her feet and ankles. Vierce presented skates next, their blades gleaming in the bright sunlight. “Lace tight,” he said. “Then when you think it’s tight enough pull it tighter.”

“Is that really necessary?” said Elara.

“You’ll see.” Vierce started on his own laces, and to her bemusement he seemed to take his own advice. So she finished up, tucked the ends of her laces into the tops of her skates, and stood.

“Oh.” She was just a couple of inches taller than she really ought to be, and only the rigid padding through her ankles and feet connected her to the blades at the bottom. “All right, the socks were a good idea.”

Vierce grinned. In one smooth and dizzying move he rose to his full height plus skates, interrupting the sun. She wobbled, looking up at him, but didn't lose her balance. "Come on," he said, making some tiny motion that sent him gliding backward toward the clear iced expanse of the lake. "This is where it gets good."



In winter, the wind when accompanied by low temperatures chills a person quickly.

Sergeant Elara Dorne stood just inside the Olaris compound's gate, looking out. She had a few precious minutes before her shift started. Above her, and around her, and before her, the muted Tarisian sky was letting fall fluffy fingerprints of snow.

Tap and melt, tap and melt on her face, like nothing she had ever felt. A lacy tangle caught on her eyelashes and, before she could shake it away, melted like a tear. She wiped it aside and surveyed the Tarisian countryside: its broken skyscrapers softened into grayness, its twisted terrain made smooth and mysterious by a quietly, industriously growing blanket of snow.

When traveling in the Arctic you should take care.

She knew the book, but this was different.

Text from Army Field Manual FM 21-76.



"The search will be dangerous," said Yuun. "When we leave shelter the elements may work against us. Tracks are hidden in blowing snow. Cold may compromise our instruments. A crafty quarry may confuse her signs. She has had all night to gain on us, if she braved the storm. We must be watchful for every sign."

Vierce followed the Gand out of the squad's shelter and into the dazzling day. To everyone's surprise, the storm had passed. In all the wide smooth world from horizon to horizon there was no mark except the wide, arrow-straight tracks of one fleeing target, crystal clear.

Vierce looked sidelong at Yuun. "Is this what you feel like all the time?"



Yuun smelled it the moment he entered the room. He looked for the banquet table, but it was surrounded by a solid wall of people.

Unaccustomed to small talk as he was, he started chatting up the nearest group. These were all Republic veterans, friendly, seasonally festive, and surprisingly knowledgeable about Havoc Squad. It wasn't the security Yuun would have preferred.

But he made it, handing from group to group, until he reached the end of the table, where a smooth purple cylinder on a plate gave off the scent of home.

Vierce showed up behind him like a mountain on the move. "I don't know how to pronounce it, but I thought you might like the taste of something Gand."

"It is appreciated." And for the first time in any Republic Army party, he cut himself a slice of something completely homey.



Vierce stared at the elegant package in his hands. "Voss *dobi*-chocolate? Vik, this is embargoed throughout Republic space."

Tanno Vik grinned. "Sure is, boss."

"You are something else. Not that I'm complaining."



"These shelters supposed to keep the cold out?" grouched Jorgan. The fur on what little exposed flesh he had was fluffed into an unhappy nimbus.

"It is forty degrees below zero outside," volunteered Yuun. "This is an improvement."

"Oh, this is garbage," said Tanno Vik. He grabbed one of the metal supply drums from the shelter's wall and tossed it into the center. He unslung his rifle and unleashed a torrent of blaster fire onto the unfortunate container. Buffeted now by the repetitive yelp of fire, Vik kept shooting. Yuun and Jorgan flattened themselves against the wall and watched as the acrid-smelling can started to steam.

Moments or days later he stopped. “Better,” he said, lowering his rifle and grinning. The other soldiers just stared across the toasty warm can. “What? You were all thinking it.”



“Merry Life Day to the Republic!”

“Cut!” said the media management guy. “Script says ‘Merry Life Day to all.’”

“Yes,” said the battle droid, “but only the free and enlightened citizens of the Republic can really appreciate it.”

“We’re making this message universal, Forex – can I call you Forex? We really want to reach out to citizens of all nations. That’s what being a goodwill ambassador for the Republic is all about.”

There was a silence.

“According to my databanks,” said M1-4X, “being a goodwill ambassador for the Republic is about securing a crushing victory in arms for the Republic, to increase goodwill.”

“That’s...uh...” Media management guy bit his lip. “Little help here?” he said to the big scarred soldier.

“Sorry, are you expecting me to disagree?” said Vierce. The Cathar next to him broke into snickering.

Media management guy slumped. “Uh,” he said. “All right. Um, from the top? On script this time. Please.”



The youngest boy crawled up on his mother’s lap. “What does the Gift Elf look like, Mama?” he said.

His mother looked out the open window to Tatooine’s dusty expanse. “Well, he’s very large and roly-poly, with bright eyes and a big booming voice. And he carries a bag of presents for all good children.”

A rumbling silenced her. A giant rounded droid skittered up the path and leaned its angular head into the room, eyes glowing. “Happy Life Day to the Republic!” it bellowed, and extracted a little red box from a big bag, and threw it hard enough to knock the already-stunned boy to the floor. The droid cheerfully targeted two more at the other children and then, spinning in place, galloped back down the street. “And to all a gooood niight!”



“Forex, I’m looking at an after action report for what you have titled...” Garza eyed her console balefully... “Operation Ho Ho Ho.”

“Yes, sir! A resounding success for the Republic!”

“You appropriated several thousand credits’ worth of children’s toys and went on a joyride with the Havoc Squad transport.”

“With my CO’s permission, sir! Havoc Squad successfully spread holiday spirit to no fewer than three planets in twenty-four hours!”

“Holiday spirit and medbay visits for contusions for some forty-seven children.”

“I adjusted the speed of gift delivery,” M1-4X said contritely. “But the children were so excited! Several wished to pose with their humble deliverer.”

“Yes, I see the pictures,” said Garza. “Are you aware that the second planet on your list doesn’t even celebrate Life Day?”

“I did wonder why they were so surprised.”

“The bruised children there are considering lawsuits.”

“But...Life Day!”

“Lawsuits, Forex. For your half-baked idea.”

There was a pause.

“Forex? Are you listening?”

“I’m preparing the statement I will make at my court-martial,” M1-4X said in what passed for a small voice. “I just wanted a merry Life Day for the Republic.”

“The day I court-martial a droid for overzealous holiday cheer is the day this job gets too bizarre for me,” grumbled Garza. “I’ll handle it. Dismissed.”

Bounty Hunter



“I don’t sing.”

“It’s Life Day,” said Mako. “Everybody sings! Even Gault sings!”

“You are not getting me that drunk again,” came a distant voice.

“Come on,” said Mako. “One little carol to send to the fans back home.”

“I don’t even speak Basic,” said Calline. “Can’t sing.”

“Is that my cue to find traditional Chiss carols for you to, um, carol?”

Calline balled her fists on her hips. “No.”

“Come on. One little ditty and I’ll get this microphone out of your face.”

Calline glared.

Mako stared.

“La-la,” grumbled Calline.

“Yess!” said Mako, snapping the microphone away as promised.

“I hate you,” muttered Calline.

Mako beamed. “You hate-me-a-merry-Life-Day, and that’s what counts.”



“Su cuy’ gar,” said Torian, swinging onto the bridge.

Mako looked up from the console. “Hey.”

“Got something for you.”

“Yeah?” She straightened, a little guiltily. “I was counting on having another three days to shop for you.”

“That’s fine. Wanted to run this by you early.” He carried a small metallic rectangle with wire leads on the corners. “Ever try to turn off your HoloNet feed?”

“I can ignore it, sure.”

“Ever been without it?”

“No.”

“Want to see?”

"Sure?"

“Let me. Udesiir.”

He laid the rectangle on her temple implant. Just like that her connection went grey. The conduit she used for reference, for planning, for fun, was suddenly as distant as the console in front of her.

Torian gauged her expression. “You okay?”

“This is so weird,” she said, testing the walls of her own brain. “It’s just me and you.”

He smiled as if caught. “That’s kind of the idea.”



“On the first day of Life Day, my true love gave to me,” declaimed Gault, “an ice scraper that *works*.”

Calline paused her ice chipping and looked up. After a second’s deliberation she tossed Gault her own compact heater/scraper. Without another word she swung down from the ship’s sensor array and started back inside.

Gault’s voice went up half an octave while he clutched the tool. “That is not what I meant!”



There was new furniture on board. Up against the wall downstairs stood a shelf with dozens of small compartments. Twenty-four of them contained sealed single-shot liquor bottles.

Calline pointed, eyebrow cocked.

Gault beamed. “Oh, my countdown to Life Day! Only the best as volunteered by your grateful past employers.”

“Who thought it was going to me.”

“Details.”

“You could just drink on Life Day.”

“All this? I’d be dead by breakfast. Please. That’s just logic.”

Calline paced to the shelf and picked a shot at random. She pulled off the cap and, staring unblinking at Gault, downed it.

“That was next Wednesday!” yelled Gault. “You’re chugging our future!”

Calline claimed another. “Tastes good.”



Calline appeared to be trying to shrink into her chair. As crew member after crew member picked out a present and opened it, she observed in silence.

Blizz’s turn came up. The Jawa looked at the little cluster of presents and tilted his head.

She could hold out no longer. “Blizz...” she spoke up. “I had a box of droid parts for you. But they vanished last night.”

Blizz turned to her. “Droid parts? Little box, this big?” He held up his hands. “Blizz found yesterday. Blizz didn’t know it was yours.” He bounded over to Calline’s present pile. “Here! Open!”

“Uh?” Calline obediently tore the wrapping paper off the box. Inside was a palm-sized device with spidery leads trailing off in multiple directions.

“Blizz made boss helmet defroster,” the Jawa said proudly. “Using parts Blizz found.”

“I was going to give you the parts,” said Calline.

“Was going to give you helmet defroster made from parts,” said Blizz.

“I guess...that’s good?”

“Blizz happy to help!”



“Boss! Boss! Life Day present!”

The Jawa was waving something. It was intricately articulated but at the moment mostly straight. One end had a half-melted fork.

Calline waited for the explanation.

“Blizz made ion cell-powered back scratcher!”

“For me?” Calline said dubiously.

“No, for big ugly. Present for you is Blizz put back all your tools he borrowed this time!”

Well, he did know her. Calline patted his hood, going easy on that crazed little head inside. “Thanks, champ.”



Calline unwrapped, and unwrapped, and unwrapped, and in the end there was a long fine straight pin with a symbol she didn’t recognize carved into one end.

She looked to Torian, who explained. “Hairpin. Or whatever else pin. Carved it from the tooth of that gundark we took down on Rishi.”

“Wow.” Hand carved, personally significant... “This is beautiful.”

Torian smiled. “It’s the kind of thing a Mandalorian gives the clan leader after a successful season.”

She looked at him. She smiled. She didn’t have a whole lot to say. Instead she settled the pin in her tight-wound hair bun, and caught the reflection of ivory against dark blue in a glossy screen nearby.

“Thanks,” she said, and meant it.



Torian took two calibration shots with his sensor-fitted blasters. The reality overlay of his visor flashed to tell him the game was ready.

The first target burst into view: a jetpack-wearing warrior. Torian blew it out of the simulated sky. He dealt the next half dozen increasingly quick targets the same treatment.

And then something huge, brown, antlered, and four-legged came soaring out of nowhere.

“Aaagh!” Torian flipped the heat dampers off his blasters and gunned for all he was worth. A very similar thing followed. And another, bang, and another.

When the horde subsided he took his helmet off and let the simulation lapse. He saw Mako passing by the door.

“Hey,” he said. “Just got the weirdest workout of my life.” He described the invasion. Mako listened attentively.

“Huh.” She sucked in a breath and looked narrow-eyed at him, lips not quite twisting. “Yeah, Gault’s a bastard.”



Through the annoying mess of tinsel and ornaments Skadge finally spotted something interesting. A tray of cookies.

He lumbered up to sample. And slid back. And took a step, and slid back.

He eyed the floor. It had a new texture. Running his hands along the wall he found handles under all that evergreen trim. He followed one up to a little side panel that read "Treadmaster 19000."

The treadmill jerked and slid him one step further away from the cookies.

"Oh, har har, *runt*," he yelled.



Skadge eyed the articulated back scratcher he had just unwrapped. It involved a fork. "You runts get the weirdest ideas," he grumbled, and reached up to test it.

Three seconds later the ion cell sparked. Skadge dropped the scratcher and roared. "Runt!"

"Blizz sorry so sorry!" babbled the Jawa. "Ion power for massage functionality. Not supposed to blow up. Blizz sorry!" He trailed into a noise that no one could place. It was snuffly and periodically shrill. Everyone stared for a few blank seconds.

"Is that what Jawa laughing sounds like?" said Mako.

Skadge punched his own palm. "Better not be."

All/Knights of the Fallen Empire



“Statement: Master, taking this holiday means the entire crew will not be liquidating undesirables for a whole day.”

Rho looked up. “That’s true.”

“Request: May I go out to the city to locate and eliminate suitable targets?”

The Jedi’s jaw dropped. “No!”

“Complaint: Standing around watching the ritualistic exchange of trinkets will be excessively dull.”

“I am not giving you a murderous rampage for Life Day.”

HK-51, insofar as a droid can sulk, sulked.



HK-51 was in the shower. It was not running. He was singing.

*“On the sixth day of Life Day, my true love gave to me,
Six Mandalorians,
Five sitting ducks!
Fo-our Nikto toughs
Three Gen’Dai
Two-o Houks at arms
And a clear shot at my enemies!”*

“HK,” yelled Niselle, “why are you in the shower?”

“Defensive ploy: It’s where you sing, master. I was just seeking verisimilitude.”

“Annoyed order: Get out and go sing at my new apprentice. Stars know he needs cheering up.”

“Promise: There’s much more where that came from, master.”

“That’s nice. *Let me shower now.*”



“Life Day is a big holiday, most of the places I’ve traveled,” said Larr Gith. “You must have something like it.”

“There is the Feast of the Emperor’s Bounty,” said Senya. “The finest products from subjugated worlds are brought together to fuel a whole holiday.”

Larr Gith’s eyes seemed to develop a little strain around the edges. “That’s very...cultural,” she said tactfully.

She half smiled. “The children play pranks, too. It’s their biggest excuse all year. I might show you sometime.”

Larr Gith swallowed. “Have I mentioned what a great alternative Life Day is?”



“I haven’t done this in a while,” said Senya. “I’m amazed your people do it annually. Where everybody gets everybody everything? It’s...daunting.”

“If you ask some people, presents are what Life Day is all about.” Ruth smiled and unwrapped the little cube Senya had given her. Inside was a travel kit: moisturizer, shampoo. And a toothbrush. “Thank you,” said Ruth, tamping down a laugh. “It’s lovely.”

“The last person I got gifts for received the Ordos sector,” Senya said evenly. “I don’t shop that often.”



“They didn’t really go for Life Day growing up,” said Theron. “Something about attachment to possessions.”

“Your upbringing was terrible,” said Larr Gith.

“Well, they had their moments.”

“Yes, but nice holidays doesn’t seem to be one of them. Say, do you want bormu or nerf for the big day?”

Theron’s nose wrinkled. “Somebody eats bormu? And likes it?”

“Sure! But I’ll pencil you in for nerf if you want to be a sissy about it.”

“Is relentless mockery also a Life Day tradition?”

“Oh, no,” Larr Gith said sweetly. “That’s just me.”



“Here,” said Wynston, offering a flat package to Theron. “One professional to another.”

“Wynston, you didn’t need to...”

“When someone saves my life enough, I start to insist. Open it.”

Theron did. He shook out a fine microfiber rectangle, large.

Theron cocked his head. “You got me a...towel?”

“They turn out shockingly useful. Trust me, you’ll wonder how you ever got on without one.”

“A towel.” Theron shook it experimentally. “Well, I’ve got a year to find a weirder present for you, so...I’ll keep an eye out.”

Wynston shrugged modest acceptance. “Just don’t forget where your towel is.”



“Hey, don’t wander off, I’m going to need that torque-“

As Koth swung clear of the downed fighter, a snowball hit him square in the shoulder.

“What! Is this- snow?” Koth looked around wildly until he saw where Larr Gith was standing, beaming. “This is Odessen, woman! Where did you even get this?”

“I had them made especially for the season,” sang Larr Gith. “Dodge this!”

He did, with alacrity, which seemed to disappoint the Jedi. “It’s on,” he called back. “You know that, right?”

Her eyes danced. “Bring it.”



“No Life Day where I’m from,” confirmed Koth. Ruth stared in consternation. “We had Emperor’s ascension, Emperor’s birthday, Emperor’s Victory, Emperor’s admittedly uninspiredly named Other Victory....”

“Friend,” she said, “you have more in common with my Empire than you think.”

Koth hunched his shoulders. “Yes, but our Emperor isn’t crazy.”

“Right. That’s the distinction.”

“Well, it’s true.”



“Larr, we’re going to have to sweep the Rentor system...”

“After Life Day.”

Lana brought up her chin, seemingly nonplussed at the interruption. “What? When’s Life Day?”

“Three days from now?”

“Oh.” Lana didn’t look pleased. “Look, these crises aren’t going to move out of the way for a holiday.”

“No, but I’m taking that holiday. I know, I’m a monster. You should take it, too.”

Lana sighed impatiently. “Can’t it move a few days?”

“No.”

“Just one? It would really-“

“No.”

Lana bit her lip. “You can be very difficult to work with.”

“You can tell me that after you see what I got you.”

Lana started. “You got me something? What?”

“You’ll find out. In three days.”

“Can’t it move a few days?” she said plaintively.

Larr Gith grinned. “No.”



“’Twas the night before Life Day, and all through the base, not a creature was stirring, except for our ace.” Wynston stepped in from the hallway. “The galaxy will get on without you for one night’s sleep on a holiday like this.”

Lana Beniko pushed back from the big projector. “Trouble won’t take a day off just because we do.”

“Lana. Go to sleep. Wake up. Open presents. Drink decadent drinks. Sing carols if you want. I know you’re Sith, but...let yourself relax.”

She hesitated.

“Let me take up the watch if that’s what worries you. I’m an old hand at disrupted sleep schedules.”

“So am I, Wynston.”

“Yes, but the galaxy can’t rest on your shoulders 24/7. Give it up for a while. Twelve hours.”

“Long enough for catastrophe.”

Wynston waited.

“All right,” she said gruffly. “But only because you’re impossible.”

“My pleasure,” he said, and let her go.



“Observation: Master, you have been humming under your breath for nearly three hours now.”

Ruth looked up from her work. “Really?”

“Defense: I wouldn’t lie to you, master. Curiosity: what has possessed you to take up singing?”

“I’ve been singing for years, HK. Off and on. More off than on. Okay, maybe not much at all.”

“Prompt: But you are now.”

“It’s Life Day season. The music’s all over the place.”

“Pleased announcement: I have succeeded in avoiding it, master. Until now.”

Ruth looked HK-55 in the glowing eye.

“It’s the most,” she sang.

HK-55’s servos whirred in quiet protest.

“Wonderful time,” she sang.

HK-55’s eyes dimmed, no doubt as power was rerouted to the self-control circuits.

“Of, the, year,” Ruth finished cheerfully.

“Realization: I have somewhere to be,” HK-55 creaked, and walked out.



“Everything,” grumbled Nalenne, and pushed two buttons and a dry bean toward the droid across the table.

“He’s spun that seventeen times in a row,” said Vette. “For the record.”

“Kind offer: I could tell you the exact odds of that happening in a random process,” HK-55 said sweetly.

“If he were winning more than the contents of the couch cushions I might take offense,” rumbled Pierce.

HK-55 swept his winnings into a pile of odds and ends. “Boast: It’s only a game of chance if you lack the cognitive capacity to memorize and predict the properties of the table surface.” He picked up the top and flared his eyes theatrically. “Who’s next?”



“We are at war,” Darth Marr said stiffly.

“Yes,” said Larr Gith, “and we need something for the Life Day tree. Does your quartermaster stock craft supplies?”

“No,” growled Marr.

One of the staff at a nearby console brought his head up. “Actually, sir, Captain Quorek-“

“Is not part of this discussion,” said Marr. “Dismissed, Lieutenant.”

Larr Gith tossed her hair. “Never mind that, we can improvise. Does someone have a standalone coat rack?”

“If they did,” said Marr, “I would not give it to you. We have a war to conduct.”

“Yes, and the war will still be there after Life Day, so I’m really not seeing the problem.” Larr Gith surveyed the bridge with a thoughtful finger at her lip.

“Tinsel. We need tinsel.”

“Do you waste the Jedi Council’s time with this frippery?” thundered Marr.

“Oh, absolutely. Say, you wouldn’t be interested in a festive hat, would you?”

“I am going,” he grated at last, “to the council room. You can join me when you’re finished *decorating*.”



“Attention! Attention everybody on whichever ship this is, I’ve lost track, but I’m sure you’re great. The company Life Day party will be starting on the bridge in-“

Darth Marr seized the microphone. “There will be no Life Day festivities until after this battle is won.”

“Jeez, hardass much?” said Nalenne, swaying.

“I do possess priorities, a concept you have publicly and decisively eliminated as a possible factor in your decision-making.”

“You know what else is public and decisive? Parties.”

Marr jabbed a finger at her face. “I didn’t vote for you, Wrath.”

“Right back atcha, Mr. King of the Empire.”

Nalenne sulked. Marr stood looking imposing, which according to *some* people was at least as morale-building as a holiday party would be.



Calline reached into the droid parts in the box. She grasped a stepper motor and tried to pull it out. She pulled and twisted.

And the droid hummed to life. Its eyes lit up. “Oh, master, I apologize! Whatever I did, I’ll stop! Please don’t deactivate me – where are my legs?”

Calline pointed.

“They’re not even attached!”

Calline shrugged.

“You took me apart! I swear I’ll do better, master!”

Calline beckoned her astromech over. “Go nuts,” she said. “Happy Life Day.”

T5 = make // 2V = helpful?

Calline thought about it. “No.”



The assault went like this:
A burst of warm nutmeg-scented air
A braying tweet from a noisemaker
An explosion of shiny red and green ribbons
Glitter

“Happy Life Day,” yelled C2-N2, brandishing his noisemaker. “Master, I have decorated the ship in your absence to match the festivities!”

Nic, drenched in glitter, stood. Silence reigned.

“Uh,” said C2-N2, “maybe I’ll just clean up the glitter.”

“Yep,” said Nic. “Happy Life Day.”



And one more time: Happy Life Day, and many happy returns of the occasion to you and yours!

Final Notes

brightephemera has been playing BioWare RPGs since 2009 and Star Wars: The Old Republic since prelaunch, and has always had a bad habit of revising favorite stories.

You can find Bright's fiction blog at serialephemera.tumblr.com, and questions and comments will be read for as long as the blog is active at serialephemera.tumblr.com/ask.

The center for Bright's SWTOR fic downloads is

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