

*September 2, 2501 – 10:02 am local time; the Office of the President, Saga City, Caldorius*

Three people sit in uncomfortable silence, casting furtive glances at each other. In an overstuffed chair is Nikko Asmodo, Director of Hawdon Special Security Services; a young, dark haired, Asian male in a well made business suit. On one end of the matching couch is Douglas Burgoss, Commanding Director of the Order of Stellar Light; an older, red haired gentleman dressed in his dark grey OSL uniform. And finally, at the opposite end of the couch is Lorelee Seahorn; a strikingly beautiful, dark haired young woman dressed in a form fitting leather dress complete with a waist length cape, high collar, and knee high leather boots.

Two minutes later, the door opens and an irritated Avis Hawdon strides into the room with Katie following close behind. Although the thick carpet and subflooring was designed to absorb sound, her footsteps can be easily heard as she strides up to her glass desk and tosses the folder onto it. She then collapses into a high backed chair and then realizes that there are people in her office. The two men barely had time to stand or salute before Avis was in her chair; Lorelee remained sitting the entire time, in her silence, her head turns to follow Avis' journey across her office. Katie takes up a leaning position against a nearby bookshelf.

After taking a few breaths, Avis says, "And what can I do for you three?"

Nikko and Douglas glance at each other and Nikko nods towards the older gentleman and returns to his seat. Douglas turns to Avis and says, "Madam President, we are nearly finished with the evaluation of the Impresario. I would like to finish outfitting her crew and take the ship out for live testing, but the security service (indicating Nikko) will not clear the final members of the officer corp. Without them, the final training of the crew in the ship simulators will not be complete. Our initial plan called for the final preparations to begin next week with a launch and departure sometime in early October."

Avis says nothing but glances down at Nikko who rises up and continues the story, "What the Admiral fails to realize is that people we choose for the ship's crew must be held to a higher standard than we normally require for service here. The people he has chosen, while excellent candidates for any navy in known space, have questionable items in their background that cannot be explained without direct interviews. This, by your own order, is a tool unavailable to us to avoid raising people's suspicions."

"It is Commanding Director, sir, when I am off ship," Douglas Burgoss says politely, "I am only referred to as Admiral when I am on board a ship. But the reasons he gives are paltry at best. Since we cannot agree as to what the situation should be, we are asking you to mediate."

Avis rolls her chair closer to the desk, pulls up a display, and looks through several files. After she finishes, she gives Nikko a glance with a raised eyebrow. "It is a wonder we found anyone at all to fly her at this rate. But your concern is noted Director Asmodo. However, we do need to move forward while the public is somewhat accepting of our new endeavor. You have another forty-eight hours to look into these backgrounds. If you find nothing by the end of that time, clear everyone here except for the first officer for immediate transfer to the Order. You have my permission to approach and question Mr. Gustav collectively. Do not tell him about the ship. If he cannot answer Nikko's concerns to his satisfaction, then he is out. Any other questions?"

"No ma'am," they reply in unison.

Avis orders them out of her office with a wave of her hand. As the door closes behind them, her gaze falls onto Lorelee. "I take it you have something else you wish to discuss?" she asks.

Lorelee stands up and saunters around the desk and sits on the edge. She waves a hand towards the floor to ceiling windows overlooking a beautiful garden behind the building. "I thought we might have lunch together in the garden, sister mine," she says with a trace of frivolity, "Perhaps a small picnic will help ease your stress and we can discuss ... (she pauses as she slowly turns her head to look Avis squarely in the eyes) ... the events surrounding father's death and what it means to us. And by that, (she points at Avis) I mean you. Something is different about you since then ..."

"Enough!" Avis barks out, "I have had enough from people try and tell me what I need to do when it comes to father. If I need your advice sister dear (said with sarcasm) on the subject, I will come and ask for it. Get out!"

If bothered by the outburst, Lorelee does not show it, she simply stands up, walks next Avis, pulls her hair back from her neck and rubs the space between the neck and shoulder. "As you wish," she whispers as she bends down to Avis' ear, "But do not take too long. It could prove to be your undoing."

Lorelee then slowly walks towards the door to the office and as she walks by Katie, she stops, turns her head to her, and says, "She has changed you know. Hopefully it will not be the death of anyone around her." And then exits the room.

Avis stands up and walks over to the window. After several moments, she quietly asks her reflection in the window, "Why is it that people keep pushing advice on me?"

She looks down and notices a new plant with a note attached to it. She opens the note and reads it. A smile immediately plays across her face as she spins to face towards Katie. "It is from Alli!" she nearly squeals, "He says he will be visiting soon." She bends down and gently strokes the leaves of the plant. "It's beautiful," Avis says.

Avis returns to her desk and picks up a different folder. "Ok, off to more meetings," she says as she walks towards the door with Katie following after.

Several moments after the door closes, the plant by the window begins to lean away from the window. A few minutes later, the leaves she stroked so gently turns brown.