

Simplicity

By August and Cynthia Hahn

There is a time and a place for all things in the galaxy, even in the looming shadow cast by the increasingly violent Clone Wars. In the darkest corners of space, there are still the faint glimmers of distant stars, just as there is hope even in the worst despair. The battles of recent months in the Cularin system were costly, claiming thousands of innocent lives. Even so, some remain capable of finding the simple joy of company and conversation amid the constant threat of destruction.



"Ch'hala tea, Mister Haque?"

"Don't mind if I do. Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it. It's a lovely blend, made from only the finest roots."

"That sounds delicious, Mister Zlash. I wonder, though -- what is the occasion?"

The glass of the transport was slightly tinted and gave the surrounding landscape a golden sheen. Even though the hour was late and the cloud cover kept the moonlight from penetrating, a dim outline of the city below was still visible.

"Well, the world is a better place today, is it?"

"Is it, Mister Zlash?"

"Quite so. The dreadful Jedi killer was dealt with, the Thaereians no longer patrol the skies above, and the grasp of Lord Nirama is no longer at the throats of the people of Cularin. Ah, here is your tea."

"My thanks. But I have to wonder also -- are these not all things that make the system worse, not better?"

Outside, city lights flickered like stars. The people of Hedrett were coming and going, working and going to bed, living their lives and running for them. All this happened far below the golden window, perched high as it was on one of the settlement's tallest buildings.

"How do you mean, Mister Haque?"

"I'm glad you asked. With the Jedi killer gone, the remaining Jedi in the system will begin joining the Clone Wars, yes?"

"Yes, but what is your point, might I ask?"

"You may, Mister Zlash. The Jedi will leave Cularin soon, and when they do, the system will make a tempting target for the Secessionists. In a way, the Jedi killer kept us out of the Clone Wars."

The distant sound of a high-pitched siren echoed into the Spartan office. An oscillating warble, it was the unmistakable wail of an OPS intervention speeder. Somewhere in Hedrett, another tragedy was playing out. Someone, whether it was in a dark alley or a smoke-filled bar room, was breathing their last due to theft, murder, or some other dire scheme. The sound was becoming more common with each passing day.

"You raise an interesting point. But how can the loss of the Thaereians be an issue?"

"Because their presence was a corruption the system had grown to live with. Now, Cularin must defend itself without the Jedi, with only the strength of a militia force already spent from its efforts ousting the aforementioned Navy, Mister Zlash."

"I think I see. You mean to say that the system should not have overthrown the Thaereian Navy to begin with? And would you like cream with that?"

"Not at all. And yes, please, just a touch. The Navy was bleeding Cularin dry. It had to go. I am merely suggesting that the timing was flawed. The Clone Wars . . . complicate things. Having the Thaereians was useful, if only as a shield."

The office building with the golden window was one of the newest constructions in Hedrett, built by a corporation with dreams of grand profits to be had from the forests of Cularin. When the Tarasin, the indigenous people here, had objected to the harvesting of their world, the corporation pulled their support and abandoned the complex. Now, it existed as a high priced condominium, a refuge for those with money and a desire to live apart from the fringer rabble of the streets below.

"Your logic is irritable as always, Mister Haque. However, I must admit I do not see how the loss of Nirama is a bad thing. Unless, of course, you see that as another window of vulnerability."

"Excellent deduction. The damage of his loss is already evident, my insightful associate. With the installment of his replacement, Cularin has already become a more dangerous place."

"Very true. A more expensive place as well. Importing these Devros crystal tea cups was much cheaper under Nirama's reign."

"Tragic, Mr. Zlash, truly tragic."

For those living in the executive suites of the Golden Venture building, life is detached from the cares and concerns of others in the Cularin system. Rich, powerful, or both, these residents rarely interact with others on anything other than a professional level.

"I agree completely. But one must admit this situation does open up some interesting possibilities for us."

"True enough. Speaking of which, the tea is lovely, but we really should be going."

"Well said, Mister Haque. It would not do to keep our employers waiting. Don't forget your throwing razors."

"Thank you, Mister Zlash. Can't very well expect people to kill themselves, now can we?"

Living Force Game Notes

Effective immediately, things in Cularin seem to have returned to normal. The following bonuses, benefits, and penalties have ended and no longer have any effect during play:

- The Merr-Sonn sale is over. All purchased items are retained, but no further weapons or ammunition can be purchased.
- Militia members do not begin play wounded.
- Tarasin heroes no longer receive special bonuses while on Cularin. They retain all of their racial abilities, but the effects of the Great Ritual have faded.
- All Reputation and Charisma-based bonuses and penalties from previous Changes articles are lost. The people of Cularin are not ungrateful for the efforts of its heroes, but all fame fades in time.