

Banner Days

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It is the nature of a beleaguered people that, when they are finally freed from their oppressors, they eagerly embrace their saviors and tolerate whatever new regime happens to come from the ashes of the old. When the fates are kind, this new leadership is benevolent, borne of the ideals of freedom and equality that gave rise to said resistance. When fortune is not so gentle, what emerges from the flames of rebellion might become even more tyrannical and despotic than the government it overthrew.



It took some doing, but Dyrila and Taan managed to push their way to the front of the crowd. The barrier at the edge of the street kept them from going any further, but that was all right; at least now they could see the parade. Something like this had never happened before in their young lives and, if what their father had said was correct, it would hopefully never have to happen again.

Dyrila pointed to the back end of a speeder disappearing slowly from sight. "Do you think that was Osten? Do you?" Her voice was even higher pitched than normal, making it so shrill that even her brother had a hard time standing it.

"Calm down, will you? So what if it was? Dad says he didn't do any of the real fighting. I'm here to see Joker Squadron."

That earned him a punch to the arm. "What? Osten's only like the Grand General Lord of the Army or something. That makes him super important." She stuck her tongue out at Taan. "Way more special than your Joker people."

Taan knew he couldn't hit her back. The last time he'd done that, he's gotten grounded for a week and missed the Sien'Soro concert he'd wanted to go too so badly. No punch was worth that, even one the little wretch deserved. "Bah! Dad says people like Dal'Ney just sit on their butts and get glorified while the real heroes fight and die."

"Don't say that word!" Dyrila's little hands started to tremble and for a moment, Taan thought he was going to get hit again. Then he realized what he'd said and what his sister was about to do, which was cry.

"Oh, sis; I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I meant they fight and -- sleep. Right, they sleep out there in space on their ships, while generals and such get nice comfy beds and don't have to do any work at all."

It was feeble and he knew it, but it seemed to work. Dyrila was very sensitive about death. Even the suggestion of it was usually enough to send her right over the edge, and that was the last thing he wanted. Sure, she was a brat, but she was still his sister. Ever since their mother's transport had been shot down by the Thaereians, she and Dad were all he had left.

Another speeder came into view, this one with several people he didn't recognize. "Hey, Dyr, who do you think they are?" he asked, hoping to distract her.

"Ummm . . . let me look." Dyrila had insisted on buying one of the parade program chips from a street vendor before they had plunged into the crowd to get here. He'd thought it a waste at the time, but now Taan was actually glad the little blonde moppet was impossible to argue with. A few button presses later, Dyrila showed him the screen of her hand computer. "See?"

The images matched the faces of the people on the speeder, though the screen showed them in military uniforms. "Oh, that's Beta Company. I heard they actually went down on Thaere itself and fought for liberation. Wow."

Dyrila nodded in admiration as she watched the speeder creep by, but then a look of confusion crossed her young face. "I don't get it."

Her brother leaned close and stole a drink from her slurp pouch. "Don't get what?"

She punched him again but giggled while she did it. "Hey, that's mine! And I don't understand something. The chip says there were twelve people in Beta, right? So how come there are only five people in the speeder?"

Taan thought fast, but his mind was a blank. He knew she'd go off if he told her the truth. If she thought people had actually died, as so many had fighting for Cularin against the Thaereians, his sister would just break down. He could almost hear her wailing now. He had to think of something quick.

The man they were standing in front of crouched down and smiled. "They've already gone by, little one. The speeders are way

too small for all of them at once."

Taan breathed a sigh of relief as Dyrta nodded and accepted the white lie. She wrinkled her nose at the brown-haired Human, though. "Thanks, but I'm not little. My daddy says I am way tall for my age, and that I'm gonna be as way high up as a Wookiee when I grow up!" In truth, Dyrta was very short and very, very defensive about it.

The man held up both hands in a surrender fashion. "I stand corrected, miss giant." His smile and apology seemed to settle Dyrta and, in her infinite benevolence, she forgave him with another giggle.

Just then, the clouds overhead broke, and several starfighters came screaming into view. Each one was trailing a colored plume of smoke and weaving around each other to make a spiral of rainbow over the crowd. They descended enough for the parade-goers to see their paint jobs. Each one had their usual squadron markings and now bore the official seal of Cularin on their underside.

"What's that big splotch mean?" Dyrta was clearly unimpressed by the fighters, though her brother was watching them in awe. Someday, he wanted to be a pilot in the Militia and marry Major Starbolt, a woman he'd seen once on a poster and fallen instantly in love with -- as only twelve-year-old boys can do.

"That," said the crouching man, "is the symbol of Cularin, and it means that every survi -- I mean, every serviceable member of the militia has been given a charter in the new Cularin military." He could obviously tell that his words mean nothing to the little girl. "It's a mark of honor and it means they're all real military officers now."

Still nothing. Then her face lit up. "Oh, it means they're special?"

The man nodded. "Exactly! Since they're the ones who actually went out and fought, they're being rewarded with medals that say they're special."

Taan smiled as well. "That's only fair. I hope people like Dal'Ney don't get any medals or anything. They didn't do anything, so my Dad says." He was adamant about that, even though he had no real idea what he was talking about. His father had become bitter and angry since his mother died running the Navy's blockade, but he was still Taan's father. Whatever he said was still law.

The man nodded in total agreement. "Want to know the truth? I hope they don't, either." He stood up, flagged down a refreshments cart, and bought them all new pouches and kilo-dogs to eat. "My treat."

As the food arrived hot and fresh, there was a disturbance in the crowd across the way. Up against the barriers on the far side of the road, three people dressed in militia uniforms held up signs saying, "Dal'Ney for Senator!", "Death to Thaere!" and "Martial Law Now!" The men were quickly pulled back into the crowd by security, though it took a little while where the Trandoshan was concerned.

Behind Taan and Dyrta, the man just groaned and shook his head. Dyrta looked up at him and asked, "What's Martial Law?"

"A very bad thing," was his only answer. Then, with a smile that Taan could tell was somewhat forced, he apologized to them and disappeared into the throng of people. "I have to go now; sorry. Enjoy the rest of the parade!"

Taan munched on his kilo-dog for a while, watching speeders go by and asking his sister to identify the people in them. Each time, her wizard fingers brought them up long before the speeders got to them. She was only seven, but she was already really good with her hand computer. Though Taan would never admit it in a zillion years, he was actually kind of proud of her.

When the last speeder came past and the fanfare reached its highest pitch ever, he didn't need his sister to tell him who its occupant was. His sister tugged on his sleeve, but he knew what she was going to say. They both just stared as the brown-haired man rode past, uncomfortably wearing a brand new General's uniform and waving to the crowd.

Living Force Game Notes

Effective immediately, all heroes that began play with at least one adventure recorded on their log sheets before June 1, 2004 (excluding Jedi characters) receive the Gold Order of Cularin medal. This medal symbolizes the gratitude of the Cularin people and their commitment to honoring the heroes responsible for their freedom and their continued protection from the forces of evil and tyranny in the galaxy.

The medal, while worn, provides a +1 bonus on all Charisma-based skill and attribute checks made for any reason while in the Cularin system. This bonus stacks with all other bonuses, including those given for other commendations or medals.

Militia members with at least three adventures played before December 31, 2004 are hereby offered a commission in the new Cularin Armed Forces, a military body currently being formed in the system. This commission grants them an official rank equal

to the rank formerly held in the Militia and offers a pay grade equal to a Profession check made by that hero using their highest applicable skill and a d20 roll of 15. If the hero has no applicable skill or if the result would be lower, the pay grade is 1,500 credits per adventure. In any case, this pay supersedes any other Profession roll; a hero is either in the Cularin Armed Forces, or he or she is not.

Also effective immediately, the current shift in military power on Cularin has rendered the following items available for open purchase:

- Heavy Blasters
- Light Repeating Blaster Rifles

These items must still be purchased, but they no longer require permits and can be carried legally. Gamemasters are still within their rights to assign circumstantial Charisma check penalties if weapons are carried in inappropriate places (such as lugging around an LRBR in a bar or school).