Frozen Soul – An Ambassador’s Job

*“All diplomacy is a continuation of war by other means.”*

**--Zhou Enlai**

March 15, 2017 – Brekthal Shuttle *Hathara*, Argetha Jump Point, Sol System

The shuttle was cramped, and not ideal for spending days at a time in, even if it WAS a VIP shuttle designed for ambassadors or others of rank. Usually an Ambassador would have a larger ship that transported them to the appropriate system, and then would take the shuttle down. But this was not the usual situation.

My throat tightened as the shuttle and the freighter we were escorting passed through the warp gate into the space controlled by what the media was already calling the Demon of Argetha. This Iceblade and his Vendetta had crippled the Argetha system for decades, if not more. Some said that the system might never recover.

After the attack, the monster taunted my father, the King, with his claim of responsibility, and showing off little Talis stripped naked and on all fours like some kind of animal. What his sister forced Trant to do to Venta simply doesn’t bear repeating. I don’t think any of us were surprised when Trant was found to have ‘accidentally’ stabbed himself with a knife several times in his sleep the next day. The spineless man should never have done that to Venta, just to save his own hide.

No, I can’t go into negotiations like this. I can’t let my judgement get clouded before I even set foot on the other species’ planet. I am Triel Grendit, Second Daughter of King Grall Grendit of Brektha, and Ambassador of Braktha and the Rithenalese Empire. I may be going into the demon’s lair, but I will not shame my parents or my people by doing less than my best job to protect Brektha from this man’s attacks.

I just happened to be looking at the viewscreens, which is the only reason I saw it. A shimmer of light, and then an Imperial corvette appeared out of nowhere. It was supposed to be impossible to cloak anything larger than a shuttle, and these ‘humans’ had already managed such a thing? I was so shocked by this revelation that I almost didn’t notice the uncloaked fighters circling the shuttle and freighter.

My throat tightened as the pilot called back to me, “Ambassador, we have an incoming transmission from the corvette. It is calling itself the *VS Vengeance*. I’m not aware of any ship by that name.”

I sighed, and said, “That is because the Demon of Argetha apparently took this corvette from the Kratuans, and renamed it to suit his purpose. At any rate, route the transmission to my screen. We must make a good impression, if we’re to keep Brektha out of this mess.” As I spoke, I checked to make sure that my outfit was presentable, and straightened to my full height. It was time.

The screen lit up with a human, dressed in what looked like a military uniform, but this wasn’t the Demon. Still, when he spoke, he was firm, and authoritative, clearly used to being in command. “Brekthal Shuttle, you have entered restricted space. State your identification and reason for travel.”

I took a breath, and then said, “I am Ambassador Triel Grendit of Brektha, and this shuttle is accompanying a freighter with ‘gifts’ to the one known as Iceblade, of the organization known as the Vendetta.” Was there some confusion in the translation, and we missed the date? Or were these humans simply paranoid, and challenging any ship that came through the gate to head off another attack?

The officer’s posture relaxed as I transmitted my identification codes. “You have been expected, Ambassador Grendit. I am Captain Hauser of Her Majesty’s Royal Navy, currently detached to command the *Vengeance* for the Vendetta. I am transmitting coordinates to the freighter where they can unload their cargo before they return to Brekthal space, and three of the fighters will escort them there and to the gate again. Please make sure the freighter captain knows that ‘exploring’ would not be in his best interest.”

“I have transmitted landing protocols to your ship, so you may dock with the *Vengeance*.”

I nodded. “Understood. When would Iceblade wish to speak with me?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to wait a while for that, ma’am. Iceblade is currently on mission behind enemy lines. There is a meeting of the Imperial Senate scheduled in a couple weeks that he is eager to attend, I believe.”

Oh, that couldn’t be good. If he was going to storm a meeting of the Imperial Senate, then there was no chance of things getting resolved quietly. Hopefully this would, at least, make people pause before sending fleets. Which probably was the man’s intention. Still, I had my own job to do. “I see. And what is on the agenda until then?”

“I have orders to escort you to Earth, and to introduce you to members of the Vendetta and the various world leaders. For security reasons, the prisoners of war we extracted from the Argetha system have been split up in various locations, but there are plans for you to begin seeing them, to ensure that the prisoners are not being mistreated.”

“Excellent. Will Princess Talis be among them?”

The captain’s face became a mask. That was a bad sign. “I’m sorry, ma’am, but Iceblade is keeping your sister with him at the moment. His core group all went with him to deliver his message, and since no one else knows the location of his base, it would have been cruel to leave her there without food or water until he returned.”

Damn. Still, I couldn’t let my disappointment show on my face. At least the monster was interested in keeping her in good health. That was encouraging. I was distracted by the pilot’s voice, informing me that we were docking now. Looking back at the captain’s image, I nodded. “Very well, Captain. I am informed that we’re docking with your ship now. Please take me to see my people.”

(Later)

The situation was even more complicated than I had imagined. There had been hints, of course. The Captain of the Vengeance said that he was part of a navy, but others on the ship said they were part of different navies, or different services. When I asked the captain about it, it became clear that this ‘Vendetta’ wasn’t a planetary government, but one man and those following him, for the sole purpose of attacking the Empire. This ‘Earth’ didn’t even HAVE a planetary government! They were still in the nation-state stage!

If this was simply a coalition of different nations, then the whole situation would be easier to manage. With a coalition, there is always compromise, since coalitions have to balance their individual desires and how far they are willing to go in pursuit of a common goal. But this Vendetta wasn’t a coalition. It was a cult of personality, following someone who clearly had no qualms about committing atrocities to answer for the invasion of his home, and was able to convince people to go along with it! There was no limiting factor on Iceblade, save for the number of ships he commanded.

If that wasn’t bad enough, apparently this Iceblade had made his reputation as both a thief and assassin by going to outrageous extremes against those who betrayed him or took something from him. The only bright side to this whole thing is that he appeared to be the kind of man who valued contracts, and would abide by them, at least until someone betrayed him. Then all bets were off. That was important. If his attacks could be diverted to just the Kratuans, then he might be willing to accept a peace settlement, and abide by it.

May 6, 2017 – Brekthal Embassy, Tokyo, Japan

Under the advice of Captain Hauser, the Embassy had been established in the country these humans called Japan, instead of his own country of ‘United Kingdom’ or the ‘America’ that Iceblade is supposed to come from. When I asked why, he simply said that there were ‘cultural issues’ that may make the Japanese more hospitable to my presence than other countries.

Certainly, from my reading and interactions, I found that there was a culture of hospitality and respect in this country, which was gratifying to see, but nothing to indicate what the Captain was talking about. Until I started doing research on the culture of Japan. References to fox-spirits and other creatures abounded, and their ‘manga’ and ‘anime’ had a lot of what they called nekomimi, and looked disturbingly like a Brekthal with more human features. It was unsettling to think that I was a walking fetish to some people, but I had to thank Hauser. He hadn’t lied when he said that this land would be most willing to accept my presence. I wasn’t even in America that much, and there were riots in this ‘Washington, D.C.’ against my presence.

As I was considering the news, Thathi, my aide, appeared by my side. “Your Highness, there is a communique from home, bearing news from the Imperial Senate.”

I perked up, and looked at the slender female. “Yes? What is it?”

Thathi gulped, and said, “Iceblade attacked the Senate itself on Rithena Prime. All the senators are dead, save our own delegation, as your Father was arriving in orbit when the attack happened. He had planned to address the Senate about the continuing state of affairs in Argetha.”

That was his stated purpose, no doubt. But I had warned him that Iceblade would be appearing at the Senate, and it seemed he’d heeded my advice and given our senators a way to miss the attack without seeming like they had foreknowledge. Still, the brazen nature of an assault upon the capital of the Empire! “How many were involved in the attack? Were there any survivors? And did Iceblade lose anyone?” Please say he didn’t lose anyone. I had a feeling worlds would burn if that happened.

“Iceblade broadcast the Senate proceedings to the entire planet. He attacked alone, using explosives to isolate the Senate chamber, and then using a sword to kill the entire senate, including the security forces. There were no survivors, and Iceblade escaped after issuing his threats.”

I groaned as I hid my head in my hands. One man did all that? And threats? What did he do now? “What did he do?”

“He said that, if this war continued, ‘your worlds will burn’. And he claimed ‘We are the Vendetta. We answer the blood of one with the blood of a thousand.’”

“Send word to my Father. Tell him that under no circumstances should he underestimate Iceblade. He will not hesitate to do as he says, if it is at all within his abilities. And I don’t think we’ve seen the full extents he is willing to go to in order to end this conflict on his terms.”

“Understood.”

I sighed as Thathi turned and left the room. These humans had a saying, “May you live in interesting times.” It was intended as both blessing and curse. I could understand that now, since these times were far too interesting for my tastes.

June 20, 2017 – Brekthal Embassy, Tokyo, Japan

Being an Ambassador, especially in a situation like the one I was in now, meant that you got to read a lot of reports that would be restricted, even from the eyes of a Princess. Right now, I was reading reports from Brekthal agents across the Empire, regarding the fallout from the Senate attack. That was a task made no easier thanks to the fact that my heat had started the day before.

The brazen nature of the attack, and its brutal effectiveness had shattered any kind of unified punitive response to the Argetha attacks that might have been forthcoming. There were power squabbles in most of the polities, as the suddenly vacant roles of Senators needed filling, and that distracted from the war.

Just as Iceblade intended, no doubt.

But the information wasn’t all good. It seemed that the Silexians had decided to act unilaterally, while the rest of the Empire was in chaos. They were a warrior race, battle maniacs to the last. They saw Iceblade’s attack as a challenge, and they only knew one way to respond to such a challenge. The King had turned their fleet back at the borders, but that would only delay the assault a little while.

Suddenly, the air grew cold. I looked up, and saw the monster, Iceblade, standing there, in his costume. I gulped, but didn’t bother shouting the questions he no doubt expected to hear. My research had already shown that there were few places on this planet he couldn’t get to, if he had a mind to. If he intended to harm me, I’d be dead already. I did notice that his hood and mask were pulled away, revealing his face.

I took a breath, and then smiled, offering my hand to him, as humans liked to do. “I am Ambassador Triel Grendit, as you no doubt are aware. And you are the infamous Iceblade?”

A glimmer in his eye, and the smirking grin on his face gave me pause, but he took my hand, and kissed it, like how a gentleman on this world might do. I noticed a strange ring on his hand that looked out of place, but the moment he kissed my hand, a wave of lust washed over me. I barely even heard him when he asked if I wished to see my sister, and simply nodded. I’d never wanted a man so badly as I did this monster, this demon. And I couldn’t even bring myself to question why I suddenly wanted him so much. All I knew was that I needed him.