

The Fortress by Lady_C

OPR Writing Jam #3

Camped on top of a rocky mass, Ion had a breathtaking view on the fortified city. The high walls seemed to be able to resist against armies and sand storms alike. The perfect haven for all war refugees, which once again had been gathering for hours in front of the doors. Or maybe was it days already.

Civilians escorted by a few exhausted soldiers. The first who arrived where all pressed against each other, forming a wall between the doors and the other groups. First arrived, first to be served. Or in this case: to be saved.

"So?" asked Exo, her superior and mentor, when she joined her.

Ion explained the situation briefly. How many new refugees had arrived, and how many were waiting now. She estimated it was around a thousand, from all around the Sirius sector. There were tensions between the different factions, but all of them knew that if the rumours were true, this fortress was their only chance.

In the distance, Ion and Exo could see a sand storm approaching. This one was faster than the last. Maybe even deadlier.

At the doors, the refugees had seen it too. Panic rose amongst them. Even from this distance, the Sisters could hear their screams, pleading to be let in. Ion sighed and turned to their ship, closely followed by Exo.

Squeezed together, they waited for the storm to pass, in a pious silence.

"This one was really rough," said Ion while brushing the sand off of the ship.

"Indeed."

Exo marched towards the edge with her binoculars to check on the refugees.

During the storm, they had all gathered against the walls, covering their faces however they could. Some of them were buried in sand up to their hips, but no one had died.

The dark elves, which were standing in front of the doors, immediately started to dig up the bottom of the doors. The others helped. Humans, elves, dwarves...

"Why are we wasting time watching this

fortress, Exo? Our Sisters are dying on the battlefield as we speak, we should be helping them."

"This mission is also important, Ion," she replied calmly.

"Important how?"

But she didn't get an answer. Instead her mentor took out a little notebook from her bag and handed it to her. Ion sighed and tried to hide her youthful impatience. She wrote down the number of refugees waiting, and took note of the sand storm as well.

A guard, human, appeared on top of the walls. Ion and Exo were too far away to hear the words being exchanged, but it didn't last that long. Suddenly, a voice coming from a very loud speaker echoed in the valley:

"Let them in!"

The heavy doors slowly opened under the screams of joy. As the refugees rushed inside like a unified wave, Ion wrote down what was happening.

And then, just as quickly, calm came back. Ion glanced at Exo, who was still intensely staring at the fortress.

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps reached their ears. Before their minds could even fathom what was happening, their bodies turned around and they drew their weapons.

"Careful, Sisters!"

Exo sighed, relieved.

"Silver... announce yourself next time," she said while re-holstering her gun. Ion did the same and Silver approached.

"I'm done with the reconnaissance."

She put a map on the ground and showed her discoveries. She had traced the limits of the fortress. The whole complex was bigger than Exo had imagined, but not that much.

"Entries at the back?"

"No."

"Launch pad?"

"No."

"Underground tunnels?"

"The scan didn't show anything of the sort."

"Good."

Exo stood up and looked into the distance with her binoculars. She announced that a new caravan of refugees was approaching. She sat down and declared that they would wait for them to reach the fortress before taking any decision. Decision about what? Ion still had troubles picturing what the plan was.

When night came, the caravan reached the doors. Ion reported she counted about a hundred refugees, and added it to her notes. Contrary to what Exo was expecting, the guard appeared on top of the walls almost immediately. A short inaudible discussion ensued, which ended with the loud speaker voice announcing again:

"Let them in!"

Exo stood up and turned to her protégées.

"Let the headquarters know. We need backup. We will attack the fortress tomorrow at dusk."

Silver nodded and walked back to the ship without a word. Ion was excited but also confused.

"Why now? Were we waiting for enough of our enemies to be in to attack? Or maybe we were waiting for someone in particular to be there?"

"No."

"Then I don't understand."

Exo took the notebook from her hand and opened it. She turned the pages quickly, reading through Ion's notes.

"We've been here for weeks. According to our observations, more than ten thousands people came here to seek shelter."

Ion thought about it for a second, then nodded.

"No exit at the back. No launch pad. No underground tunnels. But the fortress isn't that spacious."

Once again, Ion nodded. Exo sighed and slowly turned her head to look at the fortress over her shoulder.

"There is no way they have enough space and food for all of these people. And still, they let everyone in..."

The young recruit had a sudden realization, "But we never saw anyone getting out..."