

## == MESSAGE CONTINUES ==

Last night's work party got a little tense, we were clearing an area of rubble and trying to salvage what could be reused when a small crowd of Malvernians showed up. We just ignored them while we worked but the security detail kept a close eye on them. They just stood there quietly for a long time with their heads bowed low; it was a bit unnerving to be honest. I noticed in the midst of the group there were even some humans. It was an odd sight to see a real person in the middle of a bunch of these creatures. All of a sudden we started hearing this low murmur from the group, we couldn't understand it until it got louder but it sounded like a prayer service of some sort. The odd part was no one seemed to be leading them in this prayer like we have back home in church, there didn't appear to be a "preacher creature". Yea, I know you're chuckling at that Dad, the guys did too when I said it and it's kind of stuck.

Before we knew it, the crowd got pretty huge and their prayers got louder. I had the feeling this was some sort of prayer of mourning from the tone of it, it made me feel like I should at least stop working out of respect. Apparently I wasn't the only one who felt this way, our squad leader called for a break and the squad sat off to the side of our work area. Everyone kind of scattered to stay in the shade during the break, except me. Once again Mom's influence kicked in and I approached the group. As I walked up to them they quieted suddenly and most of them kept their heads bowed in prayer, muttering quietly.

Understanding their frustration and curious to find out why they were here, I decided to try to speak with the humans. Being a fellow human I figured I'd have a better chance in getting them to talk with me and to be honest I felt a little put off by speaking to a native Malvernian. I wanted to explain to them how we were here to help them and rebuild their city but it didn't matter, they didn't want to hear any of it and just ignored me. I tried to be as diplomatic as possible, again thinking of myself as being an ambassador of the Terran government to the citizens of the Malvernian Empire. There was one human who did finally speak with me. The others seemed to defer to him so I thought I might make some progress with him, and he told me his name was Jonas. I stood with him for a little bit and we talked, he seemed receptive and at least listened to me. All the while I found it odd that a Malvernian citizen, a follower of Khardullis no less, could have such a Terran name as Jonas. Although I was tempted to ask him about that, I decided to not bring it up. I was just glad that I was able to get a chance to speak with one of them, to try and better see and understand his thoughts and frame of mind.

When he was speaking, I tried really hard to see into who Jonas really was, and tried to put myself in his place. I sympathize with him a lot, if that was only because he was a human and not a toad, I don't know. Of course he tried to preach a bit too, getting into the religious implications of the actions of the Terran military and how we were singling them out for religious persecution. I reminded him that back on Earth and throughout the Terran Federation, there are numerous belief systems that are welcomed, and that we were not trying to control their religion. His answer back was that we were "trying to suppress the Khardullist beliefs they espouse", those were his words. I explained to him that I was just a simple soldier and that was not what I was fighting for. He then caught me off-guard and asked me what was I fighting for then? After seeing the end product of the invasion, I felt a little humbled and couldn't honestly answer. We are told one thing by the government and by our officers, but I'm pretty uncomfortable with answering a question like that right now from my own perspective. I felt a little out of my element to be honest.

Seeing how flustered I appeared, one of the humans took the opportunity to jump in and said we would be punished for our sins against the Children of Khardullis and on and on. Well, if I went through what they went through I suppose I'd be bitter too, but by that time I had enough of the religious talk. So I told him jokingly that I didn't believe in Khardullis, so I guess he wouldn't be punishing me. The crowd suddenly went really silent and the humans gave us these really menacing, cold looks. They seemed to take it worse than the native Malvernians who just had these dumbfounded looks on their faces, like I just stole their puppy or something. I didn't say anything bad to them, did I? Then one of the humans said that we *would* feel the wrath of Khardullis. One of the guys in the squad decided to pipe in then and ran off at the mouth with some wiseass remarks about their religion and their prophet. I didn't hear exactly what he said but it got the rest of the squad laughing.

We all figured that would shut them up and send them home, but we weren't so lucky. The humans in the crowd started yelling death threats at us, and drew our security detail to move in on them. Nothing went down other than some heated words and equally heated responses from both sides. The Jonas guy stepped in and motioned the crowd to leave, and then he just turned and walked away himself. Not even a wave goodbye or anything. Guess being polite isn't one of their strong points eh? I have to admit, Fletcher should have kept his mouth shut. If we could have just talked a bit longer I think it would have helped both sides, guess I'll try again the next time I see this Jonas guy.

My fingers are just killing me from all this rock and concrete dust we keep digging through. Will have to stop by supply and see if I can get a new pair of gloves, we're not allowed to use the gloves from our armored suits. The powers that be are afraid the constant scraping against the rocks might ruin the armor integrity of them. As you can tell, this is clearly a military operation eh? Going to stop writing for now, will keep adding to this little diary I've got going for you until I get a chance to send it off. Talk to you soon!