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The Street Fighter

Make no mistake. You are on a battlefield for one reason. It is not to negotiate—unless you are negotiating the end of your enemy’s existence.

—Stancheon, 2885 AFS

ROON, 3999 AFS

Krissa, who recently turned thirty-six, gets out of bed, looking forward to enjoying a day off. She has worked at the library for four cycles without taking any vacation time, and it is nice to have a break. However, her relaxation plans are immediately shattered when she receives a devastating call on her comdev. It’s Marla, who is frantic. “Krissa! Senator Frebish is forcing us to hand over our academy to Mindas!”

Krissa does not respond immediately because she cannot comprehend how or why the senator would do such a thing. Why does he even know about Benton and Marla’s tiny business, let alone need to destroy it? “What are you talking about?” Krissa finally replies.

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“We have to give our academy to Mindas!” Marla is almost screaming. “He said it’s punishment for introducing contraband Caderyn military tactics to Roon. He said we’re lucky we weren’t charged with treason!”

Yet again, Krissa does not know how to respond. “I’m sorry, Marla. I can’t wrap my head around this. What do you mean—*Caderyn military tactics*?”

“Your style of fighting, he said, is from the Caderyn military. I didn’t believe him, but then my father-in-law said, ‘Yes, it is.’”

Now Krissa is outraged. “Marla! I learned martial arts from my dad. He learned it on Caderyn before he was married. But so what? You told me yourself that Mindas uses the same style I use. It sure doesn’t seem like it from the pathetic performance of his students at tournaments. But if he is using this banned fighting style, why should he get the academy?”

“I don’t know. Please help us, Krissa.” Marla begins to cry. “What are we going to do? Benton and I will lose everything!”

“I’ll do what I can, Marla. I promise. I’ll do everything in my power.”

“Thank you,” Marla snuffles.

When the conversation ends, Krissa has no idea what she can possibly do to help Marla. She paces back and forth, trying to get a handle on what just happened. Nothing about it makes any sense. And the more she thinks about it, the more enraged she becomes. Maybe some would disagree, but she honestly feels that she, Benton, and Marla could be credited with establishing martial arts on Roon. It has already been a benefit to many people. Now a low-level senator wants to use the recent Caderyn conflict as some baseless excuse to take that away from them. And he’s a senator from Caderyn! He must be a real sellout to kiss up to the emperor in this way. Why isn’t he using his influence to promote his home planet—military tactics and all?

She decides to contact Senator Frebish. She uses her comdev to locate the link to his office and leaves a message: “Hello, my name is Krissa. I work at Pioneer Plaza. I know I am not from Caderyn, but I’d really appreciate the opportunity to talk with the senator about a misrepresentation of Caderyn that is taking place. Please contact me at

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this comlink.” She feels better after this, but the disturbing episode has made her upset. She heads out to the alley to get some fresh air.

Unable to stand still, Krissa begins to walk vigorously to work off the tension she is feeling. Staying within the network of back alleys, she passes between drab apartment buildings that have similar design and appearance. For the first time, she notices all the trash and litter that is accumulating and the graffiti on the walls. Her shiny new neighborhood is starting to look run-down after four cycles. After walking for some time, she is surprised by how far she is from her home. She stops for a moment.

Suddenly, she senses the presence of someone behind her. Her fighting instincts kick in. She has always had a heightened awareness of her surroundings, and now she hears what she knows is a staff slicing through the air behind her. She reacts immediately, spinning in the direction of the staff’s motion and pulling it forcefully out of the hands of her attacker as it approaches her. As she continues her spin, she is now behind the man and delivers an upward blow to his head with her newly obtained staff. She has already spotted a second man holding a staff as the first guy tumbles to the ground. Now, with perfectly fluid motion, she rotates her staff at high velocity to knock the staff out of the hand of the second man and delivers a swinging upward blow to his jaw, which knocks him flat.

She throws the staff to the ground and stands over the two men. They are quite younger than she is, probably teens, with scruffy clothes and long hair. “Who in the pits are you guys?” she demands. Neither of them can answer, as one is unconscious and the other is lying on his back moaning in pain. She presses a button on her comdev to contact emergency services. A dispatcher takes the call. “What is the nature of your emergency?”

“I was assaulted in the street,” Krissa responds.

“What is the location of the assault?”

“At my current coordinates.”

“Do you need medical attention?”

“No, but my attackers do.”

“I see your identification, Krissa. One moment, please,” the dispatcher says.

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The next thing she hears is a different voice saying, “Madam Krissa, this is officer Dain. We apologize, but the EPF will not allow us access to the two injured men while you are on the premises. If you would be so kind as to leave the scene, we will send a medical unit to assist them.”

This only fuels Krissa’s rage. What an outrageous and improper request! The police are asking her to leave the scene of a crime, where people who followed her attacked her from behind! And how did the officer know there were two injured men? She looks around, and sure enough, an EPF vehicle is parked on the opposite side of the street. How long has that been there? Furious, Krissa does not feel the least bit willing to comply with the order to leave, but she realizes that the men will not receive any medical care until she does. Reluctantly, she tells the officer, “Okay, I’m going.”

“Thank you, madam,” Dain replies, and the call disconnects. Krissa glares at the EPF vehicle as she begins walking toward her apartment. As she continues to walk, the vehicle follows her the entire way and then waits in the alley until she is completely inside her complex. She is so worked up by this time that she does not know what to do. It is still morning, and her vacation day is already collapsing around her. Now all she can do is pace around her apartment to walk off her anger and try to make sense of what happened.

Recent events are so weird that they defy all logic and reason. First, she saved the life of a young police officer, for which he was horrified and demanded that she go away. Then today, a Caderyn senator wipes out, with a word, the Martial Arts Foundation, where she put so much of her heart into training and helping people. Now she is attacked in the street and the police ask her to leave the scene, which is highly irregular and probably illegal. And why is the EPF involved?

She gets tired of pacing and decides to sit in her chair in front of the EB. Maybe she can find a show to watch that will help get her mind off things. She scans the options on her remote and selects an episode of a comedy series that pokes fun at pompous government officials. It helps to laugh, and she begins to relax somewhat. After becoming immersed in her show, she hears the door chime. Annoyed, she decides to ignore it. The chime sounds again, this time rapidly, three times in succession. She sighs, gets up, and walks over to the security monitor at the entrance

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to see who is there. It's an imperial courier. She presses a button on the monitor and says, "Can I help you?"

"I have an important delivery for Krissa," the man answers.

"What is it?"

"This is an imperial directive, madam. I have to witness that you received it."

Krissa knows there could be serious repercussions if she refuses, so she reluctantly opens the door and takes the digital tablet the courier hands her.

"Please sign this to acknowledge receipt of the package I am about to give you. Then I will sign to verify delivery," he says. She signs her name with the stylus and returns the tablet, which he takes and then hands her a large envelope, whereupon he signs the tablet and puts it in his pouch. "Have a good day." He smiles and walks away.

Krissa closes the door, opens the envelope, and pulls out a letter. At the top, she can see the insignia of the EPF, along with the words "Official Memorandum of the Emperor's Protection Force." The letter is brief. It reads:

Madam Krissa,

It has come to our attention that your style of martial arts is derived from the Caderyn military. Due to the prohibition against the spread of Caderyn military tactics following the war, you are hereby ordered to desist from all martial arts instruction. You will also have no contact with the individual Mindas, nor will you enter the Mindas Fight Academy, which is operated by said individual. Failure to comply with this directive will result in disciplinary action being brought against you.

Sincerely,
General Stasis
Director, EPF

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After reading this, she carries the letter over to a small office space she had set up to help Benton and Marla with their business. There, she runs it through a paper shredder. Now any hope of a relaxing day has vanished. Krissa is completely beside herself. She has no idea what to do next, and she returns to pacing around her apartment. The more she paces, the more agitated she becomes and the more she wants to do something—anything—to respond to this phony directive from the EPF. She decides to take the tram to the Martial Arts Foundation, which she knows could not have changed much since yesterday. She grabs her staff and walks out the door.

As the tram passes the martial arts store that the letter indicated now belongs to Mindas, her suspicions are confirmed. The letter from Stasis referred to it as the Mindas Fight Academy. How amazing that the EPF knows what it will be called! The sign that says Martial Arts Foundation is clearly still there. When she arrives at Pioneer Plaza, she is in such a hurry to get to Benton and Marla's place that she is almost running. As she stands in front of it, she can now clearly see workers inside laying down tarp. Then she has a flash of inspiration. If she walks into a store called Martial Arts Foundation, she would not be entering the Mindas Fight Academy, would she? In addition, it is unlikely that Mindas is there now.

Before she acts, she thinks about the consequences. Challenging the EPF is foolhardy. She knows what could happen to her. However, she is compelled by a drive to fight the injustice done to her and her friends. As she paces back and forth, rage ultimately overcomes reason. Making what could be the worst decision of her life, she spots the EPF vehicle, waves to the agents inside, and charges into the building.

At this provocation, two EPF agents immediately emerge from the vehicle with their weapons drawn and follow her in. The agents hesitate near the entrance and look around to see if they can locate Krissa, but she has positioned herself behind some scaffolding. Before they have a chance to spot her, she jumps in front of them, knocks the weapons out of their hands, and runs directly between them to go outside.

Krissa hears a flurry of curses from the men as she continues running and attempts to disappear in the crowd. When she arrives at Pioneer Plaza, she looks around to see if she is being followed. Surprised that

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she is not, she stands at the tram stop with her senses on high alert and her fight reactions on a hair trigger. She remains in this heightened state the entire trip home. She is not foolish enough to assume that because the EPF has not tried anything, they are reluctant to come after her. In her apartment, she sits in her chair—EB off—holding her staff. It is not long until she hears the door chime and an angry voice coming through the speaker. “This is General Stasis of the EPF. I’m coming in.”

Krissa knows she cannot be in front of the door when he enters, as he could immediately shoot her with a hand weapon. She also knows he is probably anticipating that she will try to attack him from the side as soon as he opens the door. She decides to hide in the kitchen, where she stands ready, her staff held in position to respond to an attack from either side. She remains unmovable as she hears the front door unlock and the sound of someone walking into her apartment. Confident that he will be easy to take down when the moment arrives, she is unaware that he is holding an infrared sensor and already knows exactly where she is. At the end of this sensor is a dart, which he fires into the air with the press of a button.

She hears a buzzing sound but cannot tell where it is coming from, and she drops facedown on the floor to try to evade it. That maneuver turns out to be futile, as the dart homes in on her heat signature, plants itself in her back, and begins to inject its contents. The effects are immediate and devastating. She feels as if every nerve in her body is randomly tightening its associated muscle. Struggling against that, she focuses all her energy on commanding her hand to grab her staff and flip it at the general’s feet as he approaches her. He doesn’t see it in time to jump out of its way, and it strikes his ankle.

Hopping on one foot, he shouts, “All right, now I’m pissed! Young lady, you and I are about to have a meeting of the minds! You did not seem to take my letter very seriously. But I guarantee you that when I am done with you, you will!” He storms over to her and aggressively flips her on her back, and she sees a bald, muscular man in his fifties towering above her. At this point, she is in an almost complete state of paralysis, even finding it difficult to breathe. He continues talking as he takes a telescoping rod from his belt and extends it to its full length.