

96

falgun purnima

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The trash run this morning into Tareyton Greens dropped off 320 lamb and ten cord of Delhi Maple, special delivery from Nepal to the eighth fairway closest to the main clubhouse. This is four-times what it would take to feed regiments 3608 and 3611 but, in the minds of the Gurkha, everybody is welcome to their celebrations.

General Giáp's famous Duck Hook regiment, the remaining combat effective unit left from his elite Third Mobile Cavalry is here, as well as all the crews from the C3/CIC called the Salt Mine.

Also, since the Nepalese are notorious for their generosity and hospitality, they invited the lone CDF regiment cobbled together out of what was left of the Thirty-First Armored Division. Here they're posing as the CDF "occupational forces" staged just outside of Tareyton Keep, solely for optics just to shut the Bank of New Sydney up.

They were stunned when the invite was delivered to their CO.

Known as the festival of colors, Holi is a favored celebration by many Nepalese that memorializes the death to the demon, Holika. Normally there would be parades and drums and horns and all kinds of mosh pit craziness with everyone pelted by handfuls of every color of the rainbow, in powdered form, liberally thrown about but, since they are technically in an AO, here they opt for camo paint.

With the eighth fairway turned into a string of BBQ rotisserie pits, hundreds of Gurkha men and women are going around painting the faces of the CDF troops who are waiting in line for chow. The troops from Duck Hook and the Salt Mine, however, they are sporting a black eye painted under their right eye. The people of Tareyton paint it under the left eye as a sign of unity and celebration, but under the right it's an expression of dissent and protest.

Everyone knows Taiji won the fight, stomped the Co-op like a bug, but they can't thumb their noses at swimming in money.

As a Razorback is landing on the other side of the clubhouse, sitting here at the ninth tee, we have General Giáp and Anthony Gudici doing shots as Jacob and Yemi Kagame head out to the bonfire being lit to burn in effigy the demon, Holika. That said, their attention is actually on Kevin Vossler and Sally Rand as they laugh it up while moseying out to the seventh green to refresh their beers.

Gudici throws out, "I got a fiver says, Voss 'll get lucky."

Giáp laughs, "That be a sucker bet, mate! Everyone knows Kung Fu Koala gets the pick of the litter *everywhere* on Taiji!"

Gudici rears back, asking, "Then why'd he join the Annex?"

"E' said it gets old. Wanted to get away from us all."

"*Matto da legare.*" Gudici just shakes his head, then asks, "Word is, I heard you were his last pro fight?"

"Aye, I was. We were all rootin' for the ol' boy, even me if you can believe that. After so many attempts at the title he deserved a win, and it broke me 'eart when I finally dropped 'im. Bastard packs a wallop, 'e does!" Giáp holds his shot glass out for Gudici to top it off, "This Aila shite ain't half bad! What's it made out of?"

Gudici pours from a bottle while saying, "Rice and millet and, I dunno, other stuff? Binsa Gurung's family owns this label."

Giáp slams the shot back and holds his glass out again while asking, "So, what we be celebrating here? Fagan Pur...wha'evs?"

Gudici laughs while pouring him another, "Falgun Purnima, what the Hindi's call, Holi. The Neps have a celebration for just about everything under the sun...including the sun!" He then nods towards the clubhouse, "We finally got our visitors." Giáp glances over his shoulder and, noticing Maria, Cricket, Bill Nguyen and Paris stepping around the clubhouse, he looks back at Gudici, who says with a nod, "Maybe you'll get your answers now?"

Giáp smiles at him, "I'm not holdin' my breath, mate! It'll just make me squeal louder when they go BOHICA on me."

Gudici holds his shot glass out towards him, "*In bocca al lupo*, my good friend. I'm feelin' positive vibes about this for once."

"Thinkin' that after havin' me arm twisted to throw in the towel like they did, I'm not feelin' any of those good vibes."

Gudici laughs, "Well, General, I already know whazz'up, but I'll let them tell you themselves."

"You be a bloody fizgig! You've been holding back on me!" He slams the shot and with them getting close, Giáp holds his glass out for Gudici to again fill, while he says to Bill, "Hey, Cowboy, it's time you be takin' this Fredo *métèque*-greaseball back wit' yu'z!"

With Gudici laughing, trying not to spill while he is pouring, Bill smiles, "I'm here for my people, so you get your wish, Zipper!"

Giáp looks at Gudici and starts laughing, so Gudici laughs back at him with, "General, all due respects, *vaffanculo!*"

Giáp says to Bill while gesturing towards Gudici, "Listen to the shite for respect, and after what I did for you people?"

Maria points out, "No, what you did for your people."

They bump fists, "Oi, Tiger, that's debatable."

"None of us wanted to cut your fight short like we did."

Cricket says to him, "General Giáp, we're sorry how it turned out for your fighters. They did deserve better."

"They deserved to finish it, but." Giáp then puts out a hand, "It could have ended the whole shooting match. We know that."

"This gives the Co-op some room to breathe." Cricket shakes his hand, and adds, "Great to see you again, Zipper!"

"Aye, it is great seeing me again!" Cricket laughs as Giáp points to Bill, "I 'ear you and Cowboy popped a critter out!"

"Yep, and she is gorgeous!"

Bills holds his PBDi up to Giáp with a picture of Jade on it, "Yea, I gotta do the daddy thing!"

Giáp is startled by the picture of Jade, then laughs at Bill while pointing at the picture, "You had a hand in this?"

Bill mocks him, saying, "Aye, matey!"

Cricket motions towards the Xhemal, Paris, "General Giáp, this is the FIS Secretary General, Paris."

Paris says, "General Giáp, it is my privilege to meet you, sir!"

She puts out her clawed and feathered arm and shakes his hand while he says, "It's my pleasure! What's your angle, mum?"

Paris shrugs, "So many countries have petitioned the UN to end this war, obviously that was pointless. Then they started working on the FIS and, here, they're beating their faces against a brick wall. Problem is they have no understanding of *why* there is this war."

Giáp nods, "You got that right, SG!"

"As a consolation, Marshal Ramirez has an offer to make!"

Giáp asks Maria, "Wha'? We get to drop the PADF?"

Maria smiles, "If you want my offer, no."

"What's the offer then, babe?"

"You have to agree to stay in the PADF before I make it!"

"Why would I agree to that?" Giáp motions towards Paris, "They answer to them. No offense, Secretary General, but playing footsies with the FIS is not my idea of a good idea."

"No, you'll be answering to me." The General rears back, confused, so Maria says, "I need an answer to tell you what I got."

Giáp nods repeatedly, weighing out the options, then throws his hand out at Gudici with his empty glass saying, "I don't need to get shite-faced for this one, but it'll help! I be answering to you, aay?"

With Gudici pouring, Maria asks, "Is it yes, then?"

He nods, "Aye, so what'ch you be offerin'?"

Maria points to Cricket who says, "You will answer to Ramirez directly. You'll get complete control of the PADF, in the shadows until after the war. You'll get four SA platforms, again on the QT through the duration. Afterwards it'll be renamed the Pleiades Defense Force. The alliance is done for with the way the FIS is restructuring."

General Giáp grins, "Well now, things be lookin' up!"

"You'll keep the law enforcement side of it because all local PD jurisdictions in the Pleiades will be traded out for the PPD."

"Aaaaah, I'd rather not have that side of the 'ouse."

"Sorry, General, it comes bundled as a matching set."

Giáp rolls his eyes, "Both bookends, uuuuh if I must."

"We need to know who from your command staff you'll be saddling with law enforcement. Your people have a reputation of not playing well with others and the PPD is a political minefield, so it has to be someone that can work with everybody."

"That'll be Colonel Rand."

"Bump her up to Major General and we'll agree to it."

"Aye, Rand will be the best person for that job!"

Maria picks it up here, "How many of your people, in the ranks or reserves, have worked GTA5 before the war?"

"Thousands 'ave worked Scorch, why?"

Maria and Cricket look at Paris, who says, "We negotiated to have Taiji designated as a neutral territory, and they were open to that because they wanted to hire your people back."

Giáp shrugs, "With all the high paying non-union jobs comin' in with the Co-op, nobody 'ere, in their rightest of minds, would ever take those bloody jobs back?"

Paris nods then says to Cricket, "I'm feelin' a little peckish!"

Cricket nods, "Let's go grab some chow!"

Giáp is confused as the two wander off, so when they are out of earshot, Maria says, "They can't hear what we're gonna offer you now. What we're about to talk about is between us. Bill?"

Maria gestures to Bill who says, "Think of the intel and the damage your people could do right before we hit Scorch?" With Giáp starting a low-pitched chuckle, "Think that'll make up for cuttin' your peeps short here?"

Maria adds, "We'll also bonus your people the pay difference."

Giáp asks, "You'll get us kit planet-side before we jump off?"

Bill goes, "It's already there. I have five containers in the five conex graveyards, and each has fifteen hundred BR1s. Every railgun comes complete with a web-gear rig with two bandoleers of twelve mags, six extra grenade tubes and two micropede missiles each!"

"Already there you say!"

"As I'm standing here!"

"Coms, how do we square that away?"

Bill shrugs, "You know the A-u-Ex, the app used all over the Pleiades for purchases, an' whatnot?"

"Yea, it's got a coms component and it's PBDi only shite."

Bill nods, "The app is already N-2 and tacnet ready for coms! That feature was interlaced into the code since its inception. To activate you search on a specific string and you're in!"

Giap rears back, "You mean to tell me that crappy lil' thirty year old app on me PBDi is neuronet coms ready, and the fucker already passes the SCC security checks?"

Bill smiles, "Since day one, like it's not even there."

"Oh, bloody hell!"

With Jacob and Kagame coming back, Bill confirms, "You in?"

"You're god-damned right, we're in!"

Maria stresses, "We need soldiers on this one, not berserkers. Do you fucken' read me, babe?"

Giáp nods, then smiles, "Aye."

Maria asks, "We're hearin' that security is lax planet-side? Can you confirm this before we get comfortable?"

"Lax you say? There ain't no security for shite on the deck! Security is tight as a fisty getting' in, but once you're past the check point there ain't nothin' to stop you on Scorch...I mean nothin'!"

"That's what we've been hearing."

"You be hearin' right!"

Now standing there, Jacob asks, "How many you think we can get on the deck for the jump off?"

Giáp puts a hand out and, "I can get you three regiments on the jump off, minimum, but how they will be sitch'inated will be a last minute thing. We just need to know the primary targets you want us to hit so my peeps can figure it out."

Jacob confirms, "You mean figure it out on the fly, right?"

"Aye, there is no other way, mate." Giap then points up in the air, asking, "By the way, Buzz, we'll need bombs for the targets! For that, what do we have in the containers?"

Bill says, "On each web-rig ya'll will have four grenade tubes loaded with five wontons each, and two with three shots of ye old Disney Swish. The tube on the BR1 has ten, fifty-kg bombs."

Jacob asks, "Will that do ya, General?"

Giáp low-chuckles again, "Yea, that, that'll do right nicely!"

Maria stresses, "Here's the caveat, we need you to minimize civilian casualties. We need you to evac each facility, that is *before* you bomb the facilities. Get me?"

"It'll slow us down!" Maria gives him a stern face with pursed lips, so Giáp rolls his eyes, "Okay, Tiger, minimum collateral."

Maria huffs, "I know I can't ask for zero collateral."

He points towards her, "Thank you for seeing it my way, love! We'll make a concerted effort to minimize the blow back."

With Cricket and Paris returning, Paris carrying a spit with a whole lamb on it, Jacob asks, "Think we can interest you in filling a few Razorbacks with your people for the first drop goin' in?"

Giáp smiles big, "Sounds like Christmas to me!"

Jacob points out, "You do have ACE suits but we're thinkin' we can get your people in JACCs by then."

"I wouldn't be turnin' 'em down."

Maria thumbs towards Cricket and Paris who are approaching, and says, "We'll need to pick this up later."

With the two reaching them, Paris pulls the head of the lamb off with her teeth and, chewing away, bones and all, she says, "Damn, this is fantastic! How long they've been cooking it?"

Giáp shrugs, "About eight hours, maybe? These lil' Gurkha fuckers had all three-hundred slaughtered, skinned and on the spit inside an hour after the trash run landed."

Paris asks, "Maple wood?"

"Aye! I 'ear your people are nutcases over bar-b-que?"

Paris shrugs, "That's all I've ever known? Salt, garlic, spices, basting and every fire-pit technique you can think of!"

Giap nods, saying, "We're pretty much grillers here on Taiji. We rarely, if ever, do traditional bar-b-que like this."

She then asks, "What's with all the black eyes?"

"Hell, I dunno? I 'ear it's from some advert for ciggies from centuries ago? It's a Tareyton thing."

Cricket asks, "Really?"

"Aye, whatever 'I'd rather fight than switch' is supposed to fucken' mean? When ya-all find out let me know!"

Paris is about to take a bite then stops to ask, "Well, I got another question for you, General."

Giáp points at her, "For you, you enchantingly beautiful thang you, ask away!" He throws his hand out with the empty glass towards Gudici and asks, "Got more?"

Gudici shakes his head, "I'm out."

Jacob nudges Kagame and says, "Let's go grab a couple-three bottles of that stuff for everyone."

With them walking away, Giap asks Paris, "What'll it be, doll?"

Paris asks, "When we were negotiating the Co-op's departure from Taiji, you returned all the capital equipment you captured—only if they left the equipment you destroyed behind."

Giáp nods, "Aye, do you have a question?"

Paris smiles, "Yea, like why?"

Giap nods and says, "One of the most beloved golf courses on Taiji is in Wycombe. It has rusting tanks and downed aircraft, wrecks from a battle from over a century ago."

"Souvenirs?"

"Not exactly!" He swirls his arms around while saying, "These dead machines make great obstacles, so course management is gonna redesign the holes here to accommodate them. Most will stay where their time ended, but some of `em will be kinda scooted around, just a smidge, but you get the idea. It'll liven the place up!"

Paris wonders, "You mean...as trophies."

"No mum...as memorials. I can't think of a better monument for the brave people who died `ere. Can you?"

Cricket points out, "It's a Taiji thing."

Giap then wonders, "Speaking of a Taiji thing, what happened with the BoNS and our bloody currency?"

Paris points towards Cricket, "I think Cricket should field this one since she was working it. I'm gonna finish my snack!"

With Paris pulling a whole hind leg off, and plopping the entire thing into her mouth, Cricket says to Giáp, "The Bank of New Sydney was having a shit hemorrhage over the Co-op starting a mining op here, and that's because they weren't buyin' the CDF won."

Giáp says, "I `eard they threatened to pancake our notes!"

Cricket nods, "You heard right, they were going to be bitches about it and drop your reserve until you could rehydrate it."

"That could take bloody years!"

"Exactly! So we, the SA, we're picking up your notes and are swapping them out for Au notes. In that we dropped twenty-five hundred tons of gold on their lap to cover it."

"So, we be converting to Au and fils, that sound about right?"

"Yes, but the printed notes they'll generate for the exchange will have cosmetic elements similar to your current bills for all of the five houses. Even the digital block-chain will reflect the houses!"

Giáp rears back in surprise, "Nobody gets that kind of special consideration from those BoNS cunts! Why the fuck now?"

"I demanded it?" Cricket then says, "And, since the Annex carries sixty percent of the Pleiades reserve they, well, they did the math when I threatened to pull our stock. Also, Marshal Ramirez is a friend of Queen Victoria so that may have had an impact?"

Maria shrugs, "I just mentioned it, but I didn't ask for shit."

Cricket adds, "The profit share from the SCC operation is going straight to the BoNS and from that the notes they make for Taiji will end up going directly to your citizens. Every man, woman and child who was born here, or naturalized before twenty-three-nineteen, will end up getting paid stupid amounts of money."

Giáp says, "I 'ear it's projected to be thirty-five trillion."

"In Au, that'll make everyone on Taiji a millionaire."

"Doin' the math, that be a hundred mill, US."

"Like I said, stupid amounts of money."

Giáp gnaws on these numbers for a few seconds then asks, "You think this'll weaken us as a people?"

"I sure as shit hope not."

Maria shakes her head and throws out, "Nope, if anyone can skate though this shit, you guys will. I think you'll be okay!"

Paris is about to take another bite from the lamb that's almost gone, instead says to him, "Oh yea, we're reorganizing the FIS!"

Giáp asks, "What's that got to do with me, hon?"

"Funny you should ask, you're now on the Security Council!"

"You've got to be pulling my bloody leg!"

"The PADF now has a non-voting seat."

Giáp wonders, "What's the point then?"

Maria interjects, "If they vote for you to do something, and you voted, then you have to do it. Without the vote you don't!"

"That's right, you and the CXi don't carry votes!"

She smiles, "We call it the fuck-off veto."

Paris adds, "The five houses will carry on with their individual votes in the GA, but Taiji itself holds a perma-member slot on the SC. The houses will trade off reps for that seat each year. Also, both the Xhemal and the Nefer Key will gain a permanent seat."

Giáp notes, "Don't both have observation missions in the GA?"

"Look, the FIS is not a governing body nor it never will be! That is expressly stated in the articles. So, political theatre aside, in the fall it's the GA, now the Diplomatic Convention, it represents the member states that meets for a month, but in the spring we're adding a new and different body of representatives based upon population. This elected group will become the Assembly of the Commons."

He realizes, "Their voices will bypass their governments!"

Cricket throws out, "Exactly! The FIS will be *nothing* like the fucktardary called the United Nations. Those shit-for-brains stick their dick in everyone's business, and three times they pushed for world fucking government, but that will never-ever happen with us."

Paris adds, "You'll need an alternate for the Security Council, so I recommend you make it easy on yourself and pick Rand."

"Aye, she's capable." Giáp nods, "Probably more than me!"

Maria snorts a laugh and, "So, with you now in command over the PADF, I don't know if you picked up on the bitch-fest they were having over the FIS using their roundel for their flag?"

"Aye, but I `eard it was an unintentional fluke by the artist."

"Well, the FIS will be changing their flag!"

Paris picks this up, "Since, I've been told, every organization that had a blue flag have, historically speaking, developed egomaniacal totalitarian leanings, like the UN for one—"

Giáp huffs a laugh, "That goes without saying!"

Paris nods, "We're changing ours to purple with gold stars!"

"Well, pur-gold, that'll be a step in the right direction!"

"We will also be adding a star for Eighteen-Tau."

Giáp frowns, "An' why would that be, love?"

Paris shrugs, "Your people earned it."