

Farewell

By Morrie Mullins

The galaxy has changed. The Republic is no more. In its place, an Empire exists. The Jedi who live are being hunted. Peace has come -- not the kind of peace the galaxy has known for a thousand years, but peace all the same.



Yesterday, a holorecording was released to the media. The recording contains a message from the crimelord Nirama, apparently made some time ago. Nirama's words . . . well, we will do as Cularin's media chose to do, and allow his words to speak for themselves.

Hello, Cularin. Many of you know me. For those whom I never met, who know me by reputation alone, I am Nirama. I was a citizen of Cularin. I held other roles and titles as well, but the one that I would have affixed to my name is simply that: citizen of Cularin.

If you are seeing this, I can only assume something unpleasant has happened to me. I am either gone from Cularin or gone from the galaxy. In either case, this message is difficult for me to record. There are many things I feel the need to say to the people of Cularin. About my time here. About what the people have meant to me.

When I came to Cularin, I did not know what to expect. I came because the opportunity was great, though coming was a gamble; I did not then, nor do I now, respect the Hutt. All Hutts do business one way, and that way is full of deceit. There are lies and there is treachery and there will always be a trail of bodies where a Hutt has been. That I came with an organization whose membership I had begun to trust helped. Nadin Paal stood by me as we rose in power, stood by me still when the Cell arose. Others remained loyal. Still others did not.

This is not the time, nor the place, for me to reflect on the treachery of smugglers. We are, every one of us, treacherous in our way. It is known that I never lied; this is easy to do when people around you will hear whatever truth they wish to hear no matter what you say. Which is to say, I allowed people to believe things that were not true, because it was easier for business than correcting their misperceptions.

What I wish to discuss is what Cularin came to mean to me.

I saw when I came here that this is a system like no other in the galaxy. The people I met were independent, used to taking care of themselves. Some would call you reckless, you Culariners. Sometimes you were. You stepped in front of adherents of the dark side, you stared down the barrels of E-web blasters, you charged into the proverbial burning building to save the lives of those you had never met.

I had heard stories of heroes before. I had never thought to meet them. Certainly not so many. Certainly not in one place.

I remember some of my first interactions with the heroes of Cularin. Many of you were struggling to understand your identities. The notion of being a hero was yet fluid for you. Some of you called me Lord Nirama -- a term that has never been necessary. I am not royalty. Those that society deems crimelords are nothing but criminals of a higher rank. I recognized that I was a criminal, and that my ousting of the Hutt put me in a position of authority, but Lord Nirama never existed except as a convenient fiction, a way certain of my lieutenants tried to keep their underlings in line. "Lord Nirama" is more intimidating than "that three-armed, four-eyed, ex-accountant."

When next we met, I will admit to being in a place where I almost believed I could be Lord Nirama. I was cold. Savage. I ordered an execution in your presence, had it carried out on the moment.

Would it surprise you to learn that Lord Nirama saw the expressions on your faces in his dreams for months? That these were not pleasant dreams? It was not simply that my actions had offended -- it was that I had stepped beyond an acceptable way of dealing with transgressors.

Not something I could say while I had my organization to run. Now, dead or just gone, I can say it. You, the heroes of Cularin, changed me. Your reactions to what I did changed me.

You would think that, with four eyes, I would see clearly. But it took your eyes to show me who -- what -- I was becoming.

So I watched you. I listened to your holonet reports. I received reports of your activities. I watched as the citizens of Cularin began to take on new responsibilities. When the Cartel threatened, you were there. You never questioned the need to defend your homes. You defended them. The Believers? You fought them. The Wyrd? You refused to let them harm Cularin.

And Thaere. I watched the interactions with Thaere with a great deal of interest.

What had been happening, as I watched, was that I saw something in you. You feared -- you must have feared -- but that did not stop you from doing what was right. You showed me things I never thought to see. You showed me what it means to stand up for what you believe in, to fight even when the fight seems hopeless. You showed me that while the Jedi were named protectors of the galaxy all those years ago, the galaxy is not helpless. It has never been helpless. So when the fight came to Cularin, Cularin fought back.

This is why, when Tharee was attacked, my ships were among those defending Cularin. Whatever else could be said about me, about those in my employ, Cularin had become our home as well. But I do not know if I would have defended it at all, let alone so voraciously, if not for what I saw of you.

I repeat myself, I suppose, but the point is vital: I did not know what a hero was until I saw you fight for your homes. The galaxy is vast. There were thousands of paths each of you could have chosen.

But you chose to be heroes. You chose to put your lives in jeopardy for others. Some of you . . . some of you sacrificed your lives so that my people . . . my Oblee . . . could return to the galaxy. Return from the place to which they were banished by a tool of the dark side.

Even now, I cannot express what that sacrifice meant. I could never, would never, have asked anyone to make that sacrifice. To die? To know you were going to die in an attempt to give life to someone you had never met? The people of a crimelord? Nothing I had done, no donation, no information, nothing could have possibly earned that. Which leads me to believe that it was not done for me. It was done because it was the right thing. It needed to be done. So the people of Cularin -- her heroes -- did it.

So many times I've seen this. You do not flee. You stand and fight. Some, who live in other places, have said to me, "Nirama, it is easy to fight when there are so many Jedi." But as noble as the Jedi have been, I believe Cularin would have fought without any Jedi at all. The Jedi were a finger to the body of Cularin. Her people are the backbone. The people who live in the jungles, on the platform cities, in the noisy floating communities of Genarius. Every star system I've ever seen has a backbone; nowhere else is that backbone made of thrice-tempered durasteel.

There are debts I owe to the heroes of Cularin that can never fully be repaid. I never dreamed, when I came to this system, that the stories of so many heroes would play out before my eyes. I never dreamed that I would let myself be drawn into your stories. I was ever the quiet one, the plain one, content to sit in the back and watch the galaxy spin on its axes. I worked to do what I could, to stay alive, never giving much thought to the right thing. The necessary thing.

These are the things I saw, watching you.

By allowing me to be part of the story of your heroism -- even a small part, a footnote that will be lost to history -- you made me a better individual.

Thank you, Cularin. Thank you for being heroes I never dreamed of seeing. Thank you for helping me to grow. Thank you for giving a cynical being like myself faith that when heroes are needed they will arise.

If I am no longer with you, please know that it makes me sad. I have grown more in the past few years, from each and every one of you, than you can possibly know. I will ever be with you in spirit -- the good part of my spirit, the part that learned from you and that in the end, I hope, lived up to the standard you set in some small way.

Farewell, Cularin. May the Force be with you.