Do you know how to use Track Changes? If so turn it on. If not check out this tutorial . Youll need it to see all the changes and suggestions I’m making. <http://www.fgcu.edu/support/office2007/word/changes.asp>

This is the first time I’m doing a crit for you so I say this to everyone. You are the mistress or master of this universe. These are just my thoughts impressions. But if I think it so will someone else and it’s to make sure you have at least considered it. Take what you feel you can use ignore the rest. I do. I tend to focus more on the floor of the story, character and plot development more so than the mechanics. Which is why it’s always good to have more than one crit done on any work.

Chapter 1: The Molds of our lives on an atypical morning.

The realization came to her with the faint hum of the lift’s motor, as she stepped on. The doors slid open with the barest hint of noise, as they always did, the same way they had for her thousands of times. She used the lift for all her comings and goings since moving into this block building, as it was the most effective way to get to where ever she needed to go. It was the second place she had entered when moving into her quarters, the fourth place she had visited after moving to the city. The realization wasn’t that today was not going to be just another day, no, everything seemed to remind her of that. It was her first day at her new position as Assistant Director of Continental Improvement. A lofty position to be sure. She checked herself one more time in one of the reflective surfaces that made up the lift’s walls, she wanted to look her best. She always wanted to look her best, but especially when starting at a new position. The realization came from the fact she was probably going to be a bit anxious until the end of tonight’s commencement dinner. Well, at least the day had started normally enough.

The chime woke her, with its insistent high pitched shrill ping, ping, ping. It woke her the same way it had awoken her for the past seven years, sudden, immediate, and with just a bit more stress hormones flowing through her than she’d liked. It always seemed as though the bed was at its most comfortable then, as though her sleep was always at its most peaceful, right before the time piece with its high pitched chime went off. She couldn’t help jumping out of bed, she always did that, and half walking, half jogging, covered the two and a quarter meters to where the time piece sat, on a corner table to the right of the door, and flipped the off switch. She had purposely placed the item there, on the one article of the room’s furniture furthest from reach from the bed, as it forced her to get out of it. The action of the minimal physical exercise of walking over to it ensured she was also well enough alert, as not to return to bed once the task was complete. The item was also placed next to the door leading into her refresher room, which meant her next automatic action was to enter it and begin the various cleaning activities preparing for the day. It was an old ritual, one she had completed everyday for the past seven years. Ever since she came to the city of Farhod, capital of Aqlaikan Prefecture, one of eighty two that comprised the continent of Aarzoo’Tihi, on the planet of Jahan.

The advantage of the lift system was it could move horizontally as well as vertically, covering distances that would normally take minutes, or hours, in mere seconds. This method was vital given the typical structural design within major urban centers, like Farhod, based on the collectivist style represented in the Block Building. While exact outward style varied from structure to structure, the central design feature was a massive building typically anywhere from five, on the small end, to thirty five stories, and covering anywhere from 79 × 79 meters to 120 × 120 meters. The urban structure in which her dwelling was located was in between these extremes, being about nine stories tall and roughly covering 100 × 100 meters on the Interplanetary Measure of Units (IMU). Roughly a hundred individuals lived in the place, most of whom were still sleeping. The majority wouldn’t begin stirring, begin completing their own daily rituals, for another hour. Yet, here she was in a lift car heading toward the lobby. Her first official duty in her new position was to review the relief and construction efforts being made by allied military forces. In order to accomplish that she and her superior Jwalaprasad Akkmad Anwar agreed it would be best for her to start early, well before rush hour traffic. Being by nature an early riser this was no challenge for her, it was also the reason why she had risen well before practically everyone else in the building, why she was the only one in the lift car, and she expected to be one of only two people in the lobby shortly. A soldier from the one hundred and twenty sixth regiment, second brigade, would serve as her driver, military escort, and aid. She was particularly well recommended by Major Huegate for his engineering and linguistics skills. Still she wasn’t relishing spending a considerable amount of time with a soldier from the United Planetary Sectors. They had quite a reputation, a rather infamous reputation. She should know, she had spent hours documenting it as part of her previous profession. Well she had to admit, based on the file she’d been given, Second Legged Danika Irmgard wasn’t the typical UPS soldier.

That atypical soldier, at least in the mind of the new ADCI, was currently standing roughly in the middle of the lobby, helmet in hand, waiting. He had been waiting for nearly fifteen minutes, which didn’t bother him over much. The issue was that the two weren’t given an exact time for pickup their charge, something sergeant Guzman, had made a comment about.

“You suppose this is another PR where command wants to keep us on our toes, or a screw up on the part of the civi’s?”

This naturally had been said around a mouth full of meat roll and punctuated by a swallow of Dark Abnahana coffee, which the Sergeant had added enough sweetener substitutes to make it useful for poring over griddle cakes. That was the one thing Danika missed from back home, one never got them in the Mess, and not an eatery on planet served anything like them. Still, the food they ate was better than the re-constituted protein hash served each morning in the Mess. The two had stopped by Teimourian Mkhargrdzeli’s little eatery *The Three Kings*, for coffee and a meat roll. It was a popular stop for members of the 126th, one could find soldiers there from open till close, largely because the food was good, and secondly, one didn’t have to worry about dirty looks from the staff or spit in the food. Well, the former, more than the latter, was why Danika went there. Teimourian had his ownspecial blend of spices that he soaked his Stabarha Kebab in that was a celebration for the taste buds. Plus one could quickly grab an order of meat rolls and eat them while on the go. The two stopped by the place, as fortunately this once, it was on the way to their destination for the morning’s pick up.

“My guess is on command, we could use a few good public relations and they want to ensure that we’d be early, which we will be.

“A few good PR bits, you could do a hundred of em and they’d still throwthe Raza town scramble back in your faces.”

He finished one of his rolls and started on a second, or was it his third, Danika wasn’t entirely sure.

“One group that wants to kill you and the other that doesn’t want you here. Sometimes I think we should stop looking for the rebels, stop looking and just head home.”

There are three things Danika understood if the Sergeant’s line of thinking was going to make any sense. The first was sinceDanika was an engineer, and an officer too, most of his problems were technical. How to reconstruct the road between Abwa & Aqlawliy, so that you could still have three paralel lines and still run all the gas pipes through without problems; how to position the new biofuel plant so that transport skifts wouldn't interfer with other commercial trafic flow; and the like. Sargent Guzman, on the other hand, was part of pasification and anti-gerila warfare. In general, Sargent Ayar Guzman delt with three types of people: those that saw him as a thug and that their civil duty was to ridacule, annoy, and protest the presence and actions of the Sargant, whenever the oppertunity presented itself; those that saw it their holy duty to kill Sargent Guzman, his fellow soldiers, and as many of their Jahan neighbors as possible, since these neighbors are in some way collaborating with those soldiers by not helping them kill them; and lastly anyone not fitting into these two categories, which consisted largely of Sergeant Guzman’s fellow soldiers. His problems, at least the real important ones, you know besides the people protesting, or throwing rocks, those only dent the body armor if that, involved whose smuggling weapons to whom and where the latest skift bomb is going to be. You know, the kind of problems making the planetary and interplanetary news. This brings us to Guzman’s other problem, every pacification troopers problem, bad Intel, which brings us to Raza town. If you’ve never been to Jahan, then you should know that all its urban centers, rural ones too, are set up in nice grids. The street numbers are in hundred designations to the kilometer; streets that all fall within that number receive a letter corresponding to the same number on their alphabet. An entire section of streets that have the same letter, or the first part of a word, often get referred to as towns. One of these sections, one of the newer developments, on the northern side of Farhod on the way to the Skyport, consists of five streets: Razahaseeb; Razabaz; Razabilal; Razajansher; and Razakhwaja. All of these buildings are in the Muhajadean style, shops with the dwelling on top, not surprising, since there are roughly a billion Muhajadeans living on Jahan, Muhajade, being Jahan’s closest planetary neighbor. Well it so happened that Intel claimed that one of these little buildings happened to be storing weapons for the rebels, on Razakhwaja, which is the street closest to the little plaza and furthest of the five away from the Skyport. Sergeant Guzman was assigned to first Legget Helgarson Argentiaman at that time, who got that assignment. Anyhow, the Sergeant sets up the perimeter round the place, and the Legget leads the strike team in. Things are a little crazy at first, as they are always when a bunch of soldiers burst into a place, which happened to be a jewelry shop. Well, after about five minute, word comes through the Com, that’s is the wrong street address. So, the Legget apologizes repeatedly, and they go off to the new address.

This scene repeats itself… three more times.

At last they get to the right place, where the rebels have been waiting for them for thirty minutes. Only they didn’t get rid of the weapons, they decided to set them up to make a stand of it, which as far as the troops were concerned worked for them just fine, as they were more than just a little frustrated. The Legget did lose half of his left arm when they were going through the front door, rebels took it off with a Lightening canon, that’s an Electron Discharge Canon, or EDC, for all of you used to only hearing about this place on the news. Well other than that nobody got seriously hurt, well at least none of the soldiers got seriously hurt. All the rebels were killed double quick like, including an eight cycle old girl on the third floor. She had been shooting at the troopers outside with an assault rifle loaded with armor piercing explosive ammo, set up on a try pod just like the EDC downstairs, she didn’t hit anyone mind, but she was shooting all the same. Well Guzman turns the corner from the next room and takes her head off with a gauss pistol. That’s when he realizes that it’s only a little girl, one who should be at school, not running round with assault weapons. Oh, the news had a field day with it, they stretched it outfor close to a quarter of a cycle afterwards. The problem is, Raza isn’t exactly atypical on this little rock.

Danika had been carefully monitoring lift activity, which wasn’t hard, all six had display panels next to them, which informed himwhich ones were active, which floors and sections they were headed to, and the like. So, he knew the third one on the right was the only one active and headed toward the lobby. Since it had only one occupant, he concluded it was the one with the ADCI in it. A few seconds later the doors slid open and Danika stoodface to face with Faiz Gamilan Muud, and he couldn’t help thinking that name was accurate, she was quite pretty.

Her long honey brown coat highlighted her bronze colored skin and brought out the golden hue of her eyes. They were large eyes heavy lashed and lidded, they seemed to take him in at a glance. She could have been a model, had once been a model he corrected himself, back during her university days. At 1.8 meters, that was tall for a Jahan. With her high cheek bones and delicate almost sculpted features, she was attractive in the classical sense;.. It was her ears though that really stood out in his mind, a series of inter locking ovals all finally crafted in a larger one, like a shell one would find on the beach, worn smooth by wave and sand. She had two small simple silver ringlets in each ear, and her lips curved into a warm smile, which she graced him with over his near bungle over shaking her hand. Fortunately, he only got as far as an inch away from her torso before realization stroke him. She was a traditionalist at her core he realized when she attached her vale to the other side of the hood on her coat, which he had noticed, but was uncertain if she would don. It was tradition for unmarried woman to wearvales when out in public, but many a woman her age had broken with this tradition, she was engaged, of that he could tell from the simple silver ring and gray-green chord on her right hand and wrist. She didn’t weargloves, obviously didn’t like them, interesting, most of one’s body heat went out from there and the head.

“I tested the ventilation and heating system in the cabin before our arrival, a routine of mine with new vehicles, I like testing all systems to make sure everything works properly. So, if it’s a bit warm in the vehicle when we get in that’s why, but it should cool down soon enough.”

He had not wornhis full face mask as he thought an uncovered face would provide a better means for gauging body language and keep her calmer. It was something he had debated over all the way up to getting there. Some members of certain educated native groups did go veiled, perhaps he should have done the same, as to reflect his educational background. Well, there was no way to be sure on what the better course of action would have been, so best to stop thinking about it. He finally put on his helmet, the top of it fit snuggly against his multi-spectrum utility goggles. He turned then and leading the way to the door, making casual small talk as he went.

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In some ways he was very much like the image in the file, and some ways utterly different, she couldn’t help thinking. The goggles hid his eyes, which for some reason made her all the more curious as to their shade. He was not the tallest soldier she had seen, but he was still tall, a little over two meters, his nose was two broad and lips to thin to call him handsome, but still he had a comfortability with his skin, which was dark as tar, that was rather appealing. He had the uniformears of all the members of the UPS, which to Faiz was somewhat disturbing. The people of Jahan and the surrounding planets that were quickly becoming part of the Confederacy of Allied Chiefdoms, did not have such uniformity of body parts, everyone had distinct ear lobes. The Legget, and all those of the UPS she had seen, had the sameshaped ear, a round oval for the top that elongated down into a dagger point near the bottom. This naturally, was lead to the rumorthat they were all genetically manipulated during training, the ear’s shape was proof of this. That, and their height and impressive builds, even the women, there were thankfully few, looked as strong as a Jahan male. His command of her language, and even more so, his use of proper etiquette, was what truly impressed her. He had been recommended for these skills true, but she still expected him to be using a translator modulator, many of his fellow soldiers used such devices when communicating to the populist. He wasn’t wearingone, he had also apologized for nearly trying to shake her hand, many soldiers didn’t seem to concern themselves with local traditions. The fact he seemed to care, and was willing to apologize for the near slight, something all men had a problem with, took her aback just a bit.

She couldn’t help but wonder if he hadn’t warmed the vehicles cabin for her sake, the armored suits the soldiers wore were thermal regulated, so it was unlikely that Danika actually needed it. More than likely the suit compensated for the sudden and drastic change in temperature that occurred the moment the door to the outside was opened. The wind blowingin cut right through her coat and vale like a knife made of ice. Both hands went instantly into her coats pockets where her mini-heaters were located, one of the few luxuries she allowed herself, well that and the warm morning showers, and the right not to ware gloves. She hated gloves, hated anything that covered her hands over much. Fortunately, the ground vehicle they would be using wasn’t parked far away, and here she was worrying he would have parked in front of the entry way, or kept the motor running. He had done neither of those things, and made a passing introduction between her and the Sergeant, who sat up in the vehicles weapon’s turret, which was situated right behind the cabin, and right before the enclosed carrier bed. This would be Faiz’s first experience riding in an UPS vehicle and she was curious to see how it would compare with a typical skift. The major difference between UPS vehicles from most that existed in the habitable worlds, was they had round balls instead of hover skirts. Sure, there were still big tread based ground vehicles, but those were for moving heavy loads and construction equipment. Things too big and weight too much for hover skirts to support. The round balls were covered in some thick carbon fiber tech, which was designed to give the mechanism even greater traction. The majority of UPS vehicles, from the Light Military Transport, like the one she was in, to the heaviest Mobile Artillery Platform, all incorporated this style of conveyance.

The cabin was a bit warm, and a bit of a shock from the cold for just a few heartbeats, but it quickly became quite comfortable; no, Faiz was sure that he’d run the system for her benefit. This conclusion was further reinforced by the way he handled the conversation that followed as they made their way to survey the new skift assembly plant that the Legget had designed and oversaw the construction of. Like how he asked about her mother’s health, before he inquired about her father’s work as Landing Control Coordinator at the Skyport; or like how he inquired about her nieces and nephews before inquiring about her sisters; or how he steered clear of the topic of her brothers all together. It seemed as though he realized on some level that she was closer to her mother than her father; closer to her nieces and nephews, than her sisters; and knew that discussing her brothers, only one of whom still lived, was likely to set off the next Jahan war. The skift assembly plant, like all the stops they would be making as part of the tour, was a joint effort between local construction crews and off planet military forces. It was the closest in the list and she could see from the LTM’s onboard computer they would be traveling in an ellipse, just skirting major roads, as not to be caught in most of the bad traffic during the later parts of the tour.