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Part One Old City Origins

Yeah. Old City Mashiva. The local hive of scum, villainy, and that cultural horror known as the local modern art scene. Best that can be said for the place is that it's about as far from the boring high-tech uniformity of the New City as you can get. But really. The damned place is so full of holes that one of these days, someone's going to be walking down Main Street and the next thing they know, they'll be sitting on the subway tracks a couple hundred feet down. Seriously.

Hmm? You've never heard how Mashiva got its dismal start in life? Well, sit back and let me tell you the sordid tale. It's... interesting, to say the least.

So. Way back in the year 3704, the powers that be up in the old capital of Korin decided to harvest the latent power of the raging Yu'min River to produce electricity. Completely ignoring all of the local heebie-jeebies about the Yu'min and Mashiva Valleys, with their massive concentration of ancient Key'vin'ta sites, the location they picked for the dam was right where the Yu'min passes between the Runai Rise to the west, and the Key'von Bluff to the east. One would think the horrid spats of heavy weather that blew through every few weeks would have provided a more concrete dissuasion than superstition, but work started in late 3705. Despite the best efforts of the river to the contrary, the dam would be completed only four years behind schedule in mid 3718.

3718 was also the year that a permanent site to house those maintaining the dam would be chosen. You'd think they'd have thought of that earlier. And they had. But putting the town below the level of the dam hadn't exactly been the wisest of choices. The best efforts of the river to the contrary and all that. Thankfully there were no casualties besides more than a few engineer's underwear, and by 3718 they'd gone through half a dozen failed sites before settling on the one well out of the way spot they should have picked the first time, on much higher ground to the north of the dam,

well above the lake and the ability of the river to reach if it decided not to stay where it was told. Again.

Now, Kima's always been a pretty nice little town, despite the dreadful weather. Nice. Clean. And full of curious engineers who were too naive to keep their mouths shut about the interesting geology they'd found while excavating the foundations of the dam on the Key'von Bluff side. And that is where the story of the Old City of Mashiva begins.

You'd think someone, somewhere in the chain of command, would have been suspicious when all the laborers in the worker's camp on the Runai Rise upped sticks and moved over onto the Key'von Bluff instead of packing up to head to the next big public works project at the first opportunity. But, you know how engineers are. They got all analytical. They started poking around and noticed that the workers had commandeered some of the dam construction equipment to dig something of a broad pit in the softer rock of the Bluff, where there's a gentler slope in the middle of their southeast side.

It didn't take long for the engineers to figure out what the neophyte miners were chasing. They'd found a bit of an iron rich quartz vein. And you know what else you find in iron rich quartz veins? Gold!

To be perfectly honest, I haven't the slightest damned clue why, in relatively modern interstellar times, anyone really cared about finding gold. But those laborers had heard about the geology, and gotten their hands on copies of the reports, and then gotten themselves a nasty case of gold fever. They didn't know enough about mineral mining to dig anywhere that would produce really good results, though. They were just digging where the digging was easiest, and well out of sight of the dam works on the other side of the plateau.

But then, you know how engineers are, they go and say something like "if you're looking for gold, you should be looking on these lines, using this method to get the most efficient results." You know, instead of getting the Strategic Works Authority involved and firing all their asses for misappropriating government equipment.

Of course, "the good times" when the workers could do their own work, for their own benefit, without big business or big government telling them what to do couldn't go on forever. Despite access to several decent veins via the pit, and five adits that had been dug into the bluff extending from it, they just weren't digging deep enough to get to the big deposits that would let them afford to finance the workings without making use of all that misappropriated equipment. Eventually, SWA attention had moved on to

the next big project, and that meant all that equipment was going to be collected and shipped away.

The miners had no intention to follow. They stayed on Key'von Bluff. I guess they felt a lot more personally attached to their holes in the ground than they did to anything the government wanted them to do. Honestly, if they'd just been able to keep things going themselves... well, I can respect that. Shame what happened next.

The only way the miners were going to make a real profit was to dig proper shafts and go deep where the mineral yields were highest. But the only way to do that was to organize a proper business, buy their own equipment, and otherwise spend a lot of money getting things done. They organized their mining business, but there was no money to go much further. Not until the sharks showed up, that is.

You've heard about the J'zo gang, right?

Yeah. The J'zo. Big organized crime family that's still managing to stay active despite the best efforts of the Law to take them down permanently. Not the kinds of people you want to mess with. But did you they got their start right there in the Old City, before there was even an Old City to get started it?

Back in 3722, the J'zo family were merchants of, shall we say, unpleasantly predatory nature. Their reputation for skirting the very edges of the law to drag every credit they could out of unwitting customers was already well established by then, but they were often the only source of expensive supplies willing to work with poorly funded businesses with questionable potentials. Their patriarch, D'kay J'zo, smelled an opportunity of the Key'von Bluff, and came into the camps offering proper mining equipment on surprisingly reasonable terms. It was an offer that the Key'von United Mine Corporation just couldn't pass up. But...

D'kay J'zo was far more clever than the miners. They'd infiltrated Kima and gotten hold of the detailed surveys. They'd done their math, and done it well. They knew that the miners wouldn't be able to turn a profit on their already planned new shaft, atop the bluff to the northwest of the open pit. They'd never be able to repay the loan. They'd default and have to give up their mine to repay the debt. And that would occur right as they were about to reach the high yield ore they were trying to find. Barring any further outside investment, the J'zo organization would get themselves a profitable mine without any real effort. And even if outside investment came in to save the miners, they'd still be turning a tidy profit with future potential to leverage their influence into partial or even full control of the mine.

Of course, you know exactly what happened. The miners ran out of money just as the going was about to get good. Thanks to some further J'zo manipulation of the situation, no sources of outside investment were available to save them. The J'zo family took over the mine and by 3724 had become the dominant financial interest in the slowly developing town on the bluff.

The miners may have been naive, but they weren't dumb. In 3726, they were able to use the success of the J'zo mining operation as a means to tempt a number of financiers to help them form the Mashiva Mining Company. Now, you'd think the J'zo would have made sure that no one else could stake a claim on the Bluff. As it turned out, the big city lawyers hired by the new investors were quick to find holes in the original Key'von United claim, allowing the Mashiva Mining Company to sink a new shaft to the west-ish of the first.

The new mine was going to be a much more efficient mine, supported by proper planning and engineering by people who knew the business far better than the J'zo patriarch. The new shaft would be a big incline instead of a vertical shaft. Its slope would match that of the target ore body, greatly reducing the amount of waste material that would need to be removed prior to accessing profitable ore.

And you know what happened right after? The engineers up in Kima, not being able to keep their noses out of all the engineering action, decided to use the same arguments as the Mashiva Mining Company to stake a claim closer of Key'von Rock, and boy did they make an affair of it! If you've ever been past the Kima Mining Corporation museum over there, you've seen the big double shaft, and the secondary shaft to the north of it. Incredible, isn't it? And it still gets used from times to time, to bring up material blasted out during subway work. Talk about well built, right?

Anyhow, you had these three mining companies, all competing to access the layers of ore veins that run under the bluffs, cutting out a crazy maze of tunnels on dozens of levels that were sure to bump into one another at some point. And that's exactly what happened to the Mashiva and Key'von mines. You'd think that would have resulted in a massive blow-up, considering the history between the miners and the J'zo, but the J'zo patriarch was able to convince those savvy urban investors to take advantage of the situation at the expense of the poor miners. The mines would be more thoroughly interconnected, and instead of hauling ore from the tops of the shafts, the shaft equipment would be used to bring material up to the level of the old pit adits, and the ore from both mines would be removed from their, and delivered directly into a new set of mills built on the nearby slope.

You've seen the huge mills, of course, right along the river. They aren't the originals, but they're on roughly the same plan. They're still in use, but the ore is coming from the mountains now, and not from under the bluff these days. Still through the some of the railroad tunnels that were built to serve the old mines though. Neat, huh?

The Kima mine had its own mill right next to the shafts, of course. A much more limited affair, and most of the results had to be shipped out for final processing. Not the most efficient of affairs, but effective nonetheless.

But... where was I? Right. The Old City.

As the mines developed, so did the town that had to be built to support them. It had been laid out on a grid right from the get-go, with a few larger avenues running from southwest to northeast. The biggest of these was Main Street, running right through the center of town. Nowadays it extends all the way through the New City, the Trade District, and the Entertainment District.

Anyhow. The J'zo were evolving from being a merchant family of questionable morals to a criminal enterprise at this point. By the time the City Of Mashiva was incorporated in the year 3732, they had their fingers in just about everything. And I mean everything. And to be sure it stayed that way, in 3734, they funded the digging of the Mashiva Railroad Decline. You know, that massive trench that cuts through the whole plateau. That would bring the main rail line down to the level of the mills to facilitate transport, as well as give direct rail access to new tunnels running parallel to the bluff and accessing the mill's upper levels. This allowed them to take in ore from new mines that were being established in the mountains at the time, and up the Yu'min Valley in particular.

The rail decline also cut off the Kima mine from easy access to profitable ore bodies to the east. If they wanted to work their claim in that area, they'd have to build a new shaft and set of infrastructure.

The J'zo couldn't keep control for long, however. The law was the law, and the law demanded democracy. Despite running for Mayor in 3730, D'kay J'zo was defeated in a total landslide by a veteran miner, Sindo Makarr. Mayor Makarr hired many of his fellow miners to form the new City Police force, and opened an investigation into the J'zo, ostensibly for price fixing across various J'zo controlled retail establishments. The J'zo patriarch knew he would have little defense against the charges, no matter how much his lawyers were paid. And even if he did manage to weasel out of it in

some way, the issues that had come out during the election had gotten the attention of the powers in Korin.

In early 3731, facing imminent arrest, D'kay J'zo and his entire family vanished into the shadows. Or, more accurately, into the Mashiva underground. The new city quickly flourished in the apparent absence of corruption, but the J'zo had never actually left. It was all just a carefully composed veneer of respectability that the J'zo patriarch was very careful to foster and maintain as his family went all-in on organized crime. By the time the first proper school opened in the city in late 3735, he had control of a loyal gang numbering in the high hundreds, with at least a few thousand more associates who weren't really sure who they actually worked for.

Mayor Makarr would be assassinated during the election campaign of 3738, killed during what looked on the face of it to be a random act of street violence. In his place would be elected the J'zo candidate, who appeared to the people to be just as honorable and qualified as the late Mayor Makarr. Under his leadership, corruption to come back to the Mashiva government, and in a much bigger way. Anyone who who objected was paid off. Those who refused to be paid off were disposed of.

By 3741, the J'zo were again in control, and their control was almost absolute. Only the Kima Mine would remain a truly independent business, D'kay J'zo being too skittish about the engineers' connections to authorities he couldn't oppose to dare to interfere with them. And that's how things would have stayed, if it wasn't for the plans of the Imperial Navy for a new city on the south side of the Mashiva Valley, covering a secret underground Navy Base and Shipyard. But I think I've rambled enough already today, so that story is going to have to wait for another time.