

# The Favor

*By Malfearak Asvraal*

"Will you please stop fidgeting?" Malfearak Asvraal asked with a smack of impatience.

The Shani thug slouching in the co-pilot seat next to him flashed a sharp-toothed grin as he continued flicking at the arm of his chair with a clawed finger. For the hundredth time since they'd set out of New Tython, Malfearak wondered if perhaps bringing Jakar Vrell had been a mistake. It seemed likely, but for the task at hand, he knew no better negotiator.

"Arriving at destination. Exiting hyperspace in ten, nine, eight," announced a synthetic voice over the comm. Malfearak straightened himself and cleared his throat as the ship's droid-brain counted down. He adjusted the collar of his coat while Jakar sank further into the cushions of his seat, lounging as if he were about to take a nap.

"You know we'll probably have to kill them all, yeah?" announced Jakar with a bored hiss, as if he were commenting on the weather. A vicious grin hung on his reptilian features as his yellow eyes flicked up at Malfearak, who was purposefully avoiding looking in his

direction. There was a great deal that the Kessurian archaeologist avoided around Jakar Vrell, a known criminal and a volatile one at that. There was no fraternizing, no jokes, and certainly no sharing of sensitive information no matter how pertinent it may be to the task at hand. And above all else, he avoided tapping into the Shani's emotions through the Force. That was a hole he had no intention of diving into.

"Three, two, one," the countdown culminated in the wail of *Nomad's* hyperdrive engine as it disengaged. Beyond the transparisteel of the viewport, the swirling vortex of hyperspace gave way to streaks of starlight which in turn became specks across the black sea of space. The planet Valim rushed into view to greet them, a massive green sphere of swirling gases. Their ship, the *Nomad*, came to a stop in the shadow of the planet and sensory readings appeared without delay across the cockpit's multiple screens. One screen in particular caught Malfearak's attention. It showed a wire-frame view of their target, a Tartan-Class Patrol Cruiser.

The *Ion Vega*.

It wasn't a particularly large cruiser, with a long body that ended with a pointed command bridge at the fore and massive reactors at the aft. It didn't look all that deadly to Malfearak but the cruiser was well-known for its powerful sensors and its capacity as an anti-starfighter vessel.

"*Nomad*, commence approach," he ordered, "Forward authorization codes and prepare docking procedures."

"Oh look at that," Jakar said, giggling as he pointed to the *Ion Vega*. "Like a Weebal, it waits for us".

"A Weebal," Malfearak said flatly, doing all he could to stop himself from rolling his eyes.

"You know what those are, yeah?"

"Extinct species from pre-industrial Chyron, Mynock-like scavengers," Malfearak answered. He recalled reading about them while doing research for Clan Taldryan. Roughly around the time he'd met Jakar, in fact.

"Funny thing, you see. They used to sit pretty on their rocks, looking all helpless-like. You could walk right up to them, scream in their face, poke them with sticks, and they wouldn't budge. Not a muscle. Nine times out of ten, they just blinked at you. But that

one time, that or if you got *real* threatening, you'd be met with a flurry of sharp teeth, barbed wings, and corrosive spit."

"So you're saying we'd better watch our backs, they might try something?"

"Nah, just reminded me of a Weebal, is all," the Shani said with a dejected shrug.

This time, Malfearak rolled his eyes.

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They were led from the docking bay to the command bridge by an armed escort of eight armored troopers. Malfearak did not recognize the make of their armor, brown and black with crosses painted on their visors. Modern military and paramilitary groups did not interest Malfearak. Now, if they'd been dead a couple of centuries and buried in sand, it'd be a whole different story. But as it was, he'd only agreed to the mission as a favor to the Regent, in part due to their shared interest in more important matters, matters that pertained to his actual field of expertise.

Jakar lumbered along next to him, a wide grin on his face, his yellow eyes darting this way and that. If Malfearak were to guess, the Shani was planning his escape. Clearly, he expected things to get violent, and why wouldn't he? He was probably planning to instigate said violence.

*Shouldn't have brought him*, the Kessurian thought. As if he'd been reading his mind, the Shani's eyes locked with his. There was a wildness in them.

"What?" Jakar squealed, "I won't do anything, stop looking at me like that."

They reached the doors to the command room before he could say anything more and they were created by a particularly short Rodian with an angry brow and bristles jutting out of his scaly head.

"I am Captain Ixlix," he said, his funnel-like snout twitching as he spoke, "We were not expecting representatives of the Exchange at this time. What can I do for you?"

Malfearak was about to speak when Jakar stepped forward right up to the captain until guards stopped him with pointed blasters. The Shani's shadow fell over the diminutive Rodian.

"I think you know full well why we are here," he hissed.

"Payment is late. So what?" the captain asked. His tone was defiant, boldened further by the throng of guards surrounding them. His snout curled up in what had to be the Rodian's attempt at a smirk. "We just had a setback. We can come to an arrangement."

"I'm afraid our employers do not see it that way," Malfearak answered.

"I don't give two squirts of a Happendore's blowhole what they think, you're on *my* ship here," the Rodian said.

"We want no trouble," Malfearak said, palms out signaling for calm.

"Well, *some* trouble," Jakar added, grinning.

"So what? I miss a couple of payments and the Exchange sends good goon, bad goon here to shake me down? I'll tell you what's going to happen here, boys. You'll take a down payment to show my good faith, and you'll crawl back to your masters. Easy fix."

"Only fix I see here is I eat you whole and then we see if the next captain is more cooperative," Jakar mused as he leaned forward, his voice a playful staccato.

Malfearak raised an eyebrow at the threat. Eat him? He'd heard things about the Shani, but that seemed like a stretch. He wasn't the only one to think so which was made obvious from the way the captain and his guards all burst out laughing. He'd have laughed too if he wasn't intensely aware that things were about to go sideways real fast.

"Jakar," he began but before he could lay out another word, the Shani lunged forward with a snarl, his movements a blur. The reptilian criminal's jaw came unhinged and the Rodian captain disappeared head-first into his mouth, too startled even to scream.

\*Shiess.\*

Malfearak didn't need the warning from the Force to know just how bad the situation was about to get. He too, moved quickly, a flash of his hand producing his lightsaber from inside his coat. The orange blade spat to life in time to deflect the first volley of blaster fire. Everything happened quickly. With the Force flowing through him, he sent three

guards flying into a nearby wall with a sweep of his outstretched hand. He spun, his saber catching a blaster bolt and sending it back home into another guard's chest. A slash and a stab later, two more guards were down for the count, one dead, one missing an arm. The fight, if it could be called that, was over before it had truly begun. Massacre was a better description. Through the thick haze of blaster smoke, Malfearak could see Jakar standing still with his back to him, a blaster in hand.

"You blasted, ignominious—" Malfearak began but the sight of Jakar picking his teeth with one of the captain's bristles as he turned to face him was enough to silence him on the spot.

"So, huh, that's that," Jakar said, his voice sounding deeper, thicker, like someone who'd eaten too much. "What's next, boss?"

Malfearak didn't know what to say. What *could* he say? He pushed past the Shani, trying to ignore the bulge where his flat, well-toned abdomen had been. The doors to the bridge swished open. A blaster shot pierced the air but Malfearak deflected it with angry nonchalance. An officer, a second Rodian, was crouched behind a console, shaking blaster trained on him. Others cowered behind their workstations, but Malfearak sensed no threat in the Force, only their fear.

"The *Ion Vega* is the property of the Arx Capital Exchange. You will return to your stations and ensure that this ship reaches its appointed destination. Failure to do so will be met with consequences," he announced, flatly. "Now, who's the captain?"

Jakar burped as he entered the bridge.

"Right, who is the *new* captain?" he asked.

The Rodian with the shaky blaster raised an equally shaky hand, "Biel Ixlix, sir."

"Huh, you related to the other Ixlix?" asked Jakar.

"Cousin, sir," answered Biel.

"Condolences and all that," offered the Shani with a shrug, his grin never leaving his face.

“Well, Biel, I believe the fate of your cousin was visible on the holo-feed. Fail me, and you *will* share this fate,” Malfearak promised.

“Ugh, I couldn’t eat another bite,” Jakar groaned.

*Never again*, Malfearak swore.