**The Beginning**

**Verse Theris, #13723**

**House Qel-Droma of Clan Arcona**

*The Pride of Dijeet* shook violently, snapping all denizens onboard into an unwelcome wakefulness.  *The Pride*, ironically dubbed as the jalopy light cruiser was, continued to whine and vibrate as if unseen forces acted upon it to the protest of the chugging engines.  The half-dozen Hapans trapped in the ship’s cargo hold jerked and stirred as they attempted to regain their balance while the grimy ship faced mechanical difficulties.  A hiss of smoke escaped into the damp cargo hold.  One of the Hapans whimpered.  A couple of them strained with renewed effort against the bindings tightly wrapped around each pair of wrists and ankles.

“What is going on?  Are we there already?” one of the females moaned, a tinge of panic in her voice.  Despite the ship’s inertial dampeners, they felt the unmistakable sensation in their guts that the ship was being pulled off course.

“We couldn’t be there by now.  Even at full speed, it will take us days to reach the Corporate Sector.  That felt like an emergency shutdown of the hyperdrive,” another one of the Hapans volunteered with a tone of relative certainty.

“Is there a problem with the ship?” The first Hapan struggled into a sitting position, and spoke loudly as if to call out to others beyond the walls of the hold.

“Perhaps it has something to do with the creatures.” Another woman shrugged her shoulders in the direction of the far wall of the room, where four yasalamir relaxed on nutrient frames.

“Are they doing anything?  I cannot see them in this darkness…”

“I do not think so… hssh!  I hear them coming!”

The humanoids sat up straight as the hatch door to the cargo hold creaked open.  To their surprise, they did not see the Etti slavers that had intercepted them during their mission on Myrkr.  Instead, several troopers liveried in dark armor poured into cargo hold.

“There they are…take them.” one trooper pointed, but it was not in the direction of the Hapan captives.   Instead, another one of his team gathered up the nutrient frames where the stolen yasalamir continued to lounge with apathetic, unblinking stares.  The Hapans shouted things such like “Where are we?” and “What is happening?” but their cries went unanswered, and likely unheard, as for the most part they were speaking over one another.

“Alright, alright, enough…!” one of the troopers barked, and he motioned to the Hapans as he instructed his men, “Let’s finish rounding them up, and get out of this dump already.” The humanoids were stood up and the bindings on their ankles cut so they could be led along by the troopers.  Their wrists were left bound.  The metal riveted floor panels of the ship squeaked and the smell of smoke continued to waft amongst the stench of grime while the dilapidated ship was emptied of its living contents.

One of the Hapan females shuffled along, slower than the rest, still shaky from the time spent languishing in the dirty cargo hold.  Her skin felt hot and her eyes were rimmed in red.  This had not been the best of days for Verse.  She had resigned herself to a life of slavery, knowing chances for escape from the Etti were slim to none with her current company.  She had made peace with herself for her foolish notion to leave Hapes, and to participate in the execution of a plot that was well beyond her level of expertise.  She challenged herself to find solace in her new life ahead, and not be wracked in despair over the loss of her station and the comforts of life on her home planet.  Such would prove most difficult, Verse surmised, given how miserable she was feeling currently, after a mere couple of days bound within a cargo hold.

The small Hapan female blinked, wide-eyed as one of the troopers commanded her, “Hurry it along!”.  It was clear by their callousness and her still-bound wrists that this was no rescue mission.  Perhaps the Etti had lied to them, and they had not been going to the Corporate Sector at all.

But where?  Verse gaped as she was ushered through the exit hatch to reveal a massive, and busy, docking bay.  The steel pylons for as far as she could see indicated that this place was not a planet at all.  Verse stared in awe.  She had never been inside a ship so vast.  That being said, the journey aboard the ship bound to Myrkr had been Verse’s first experience in interplanetary travel, so the sum of her experience of twenty and some years provided little point of reference for the scope of this vessel’s size.

As she timidly trotted in attempt to keep pace with the impatient troopers, she then realized that she had been separated from the rest of her Hapan retinue.  “Where are the others?” she asked of the near trooper who was leading her, only to frown as he shook his helmeted head.

“Not here.” he replied.

“Well, where am I going?” Verse inquired, hopeful she could get a better answer out of him.

“Somewhere else.” Verse could not see his face as he continued to lead with a seemingly clear idea of where he was going, but she felt like he was becoming less and less pleased with the interrogation.  As hungry as she was for answers, she felt it was best at this point to keep her lips shut for the time being.

A couple of people gave her cursory glances as she was trailed through the throngs of working bodies, but most of the workers seemed far too busy to notice her.  Some were shouting orders over comms, others seemed to be hurrying to other parts of the ship.  Hauling droids wheeled large metal crates through the halls.  Echoing voices boomed over the intercom.

It was far too much to take in at the pace she was being moved along. Verse hoped that wherever she was going, she would be there soon.

The Hapan struggled through yet another hatchcombe and found herself on a smaller observation deck.  She startled as the trooper in front of her turned around and unceremoniously clipped through her wrist bindings with his utility knife.  She shook out her hands, unfamiliar with the renewed mobility.

The trooper disappeared amongst the forgettable faces on the crowded deck.  But someone else soon caught her attention.  A menacing blue-skinned humanoid stood tall and limber, arms folded.  He looked similar to her former Etti slavers, save his eyes, which peered out a striking red from deep sockets.

As soon as she looked up, he turned on his heel and was gone in a flourish of his etched velvet cloak.  She could only spy him speak a few words to an armored worker amidst the crowd before he disappeared through an exit and was out of sight.  Verse was far too overwhelmed to figure what the blue-skinned man might have thought of her, as he regarded her during the brief meeting.  But something made her feel that would not be the last time that she saw him.

Verse looked up over her shoulder as someone else spoke up behind her.  “Right then, this way, we’re going to your new bunk.” Another helmeted fellow corralled her in the right direction, and she followed as he began to walk at the same hurried pace that everyone aboard this vessel seemed to share, to the misfortune of her weary body.  But the words ‘new bunk’ brought her a renewed sense of hope.  After a day like this, a few hours of rest would be gladly welcomed…