

Captain Egan was a busy man.

As commander of the Imperial Penal Station TRK-IV, also known as Terok Nor, Egan was responsible for overseeing the prisoners and making sure that the ever increasing refining quotas were met. The prisoners under Egan's charge were usually nonviolent or violent criminals from throughout the Core Worlds that were shipped to Terok Nor to serve out their sentences, usually exceptional robbers or murderers whom the worlds didn't want to contain, instead handed them off to the Empire. The Imperials, desperate for laborers as the borders of their Empire shrunk under the New Republic onslaught, gladly took the criminals and put them to work.

Captain Egan was a brutal man as well.

Most of the prisoners- slaves, they referred to themselves- usually refused to work at first, used to the lax conditions of the prisons in the Core Worlds. Therefore it was Egan's task to break that resistance, by any methods he deemed necessary. For some, a bout of solitary confinement and withholding of rations was sufficient enough to break their will.

Others... required more physical convincing.

When he first entered the Imperial Army and found him assigned to the Corrections Service, Egan was not used to the brutality that most of his fellows deemed necessary to break the resistance and keep prisoners properly disciplined. At first, he even protested, deeming the methods barbaric.

But his superiors understood his predicament, having seeing it so many times before in the new officers, and over time, conditioned him to understand the necessity of the methods employed. Once that initial reluctance was overcome, he had proved to be a willing and able student, picking up on the various torture and interrogation methodologies quickly, and even making minor refinements to streamline the process of... acclimation for the prisoners.

His reward was being posted to Terok Nor and given a free hand to govern the prisoners as he deemed necessary. The only order was to make sure the quota of ore refined there was met. This, Egan ensured, was met, and his advancement up the ranks was rapid.

But Egan was not a fool. It had been years since Endor, and while his post at Terok Nor was deep within the Empire, and little communication reached the remote outpost, he could piece together the news that the Empire was slowly but surely crumbling, and at some point, he would be ordered to abandon the station and destroy it to deny its use to the New Republic.

But that day had not arrived yet, and for now, Egan continued his duties as normal, with the exception of making quiet preparations for an Imperial evacuation in the event of an unexpected

New Republic assault. Special programs were installed into the station's computers, and shuttles were readied and kept on standby for the Imperial garrison

**

"Sir."

Egan looked up from his terminal to see Lieutenant Syai standing at attention in front of his desk, his eyes straight ahead above his superior's.

"What is it, Lieutenant?" Egan asked mildly as he shifted back into his chair and raised a cup of caf to his lips.

"The latest shipment of prisoners is arriving shortly, ETA to docking is 10 minutes." Lt. Syai replied before he set a datapad down on the desk. "Here is the prisoner roster."

"Ah, good." Egan smiled as he set the cup down and took the datapad, thumbing it on to read the list of names and species. "Korias Verr, Bith, Saalis Ven, Devaronian... and an unidentified Barabel?"

Syai shrugged slightly at Egan's raised eyebrow. "The planetary authorities on Aris was unable to extract a name out of him when they took him prisoner. He was a bounty hunter hoping to claim one of the administration's key officials as a bounty, and was captured. Hasn't spoken a word since despite interrogation by the police personnel there."

"I see." Egan replied slowly as he stared down at the species' name. "Barabel. Hmm. We will need to break him. I think I will be down there to personally inspect the incoming prisoners."

"Yes sir." Lt. Syai saluted. "I will have the hangar bay ready for you sir."

"Dismissed."

Egan frowned slightly as the lieutenant marched out, tracing the Barabel species' name on the datapad. He was starting to get a bad feeling about this, and he did not like it one bit. Depending on the initial reception, he might... involve himself in this particular case... *personally.*

The sooner this Barabel breaks, the better.

**

Captain Egan remained silent as the transport docked, its landing ramp lowering to disgorge its prisoners, being brutally shoved forward by stormtrooper guards, helping them along with hits

from the stocks of their E-11 blaster rifles. It wasn't until the very last prisoner was off-loaded that Egan saw him.

The black-scaled Barabel walked down the ramp with a self-assured air of confidence around him, his talons on full display even though his hands were bound together by stuncuffs. His vibrant green eyes calmly taking everything in without revealing a hint of emotion.

The bad feeling in Egan's stomach grew worse.

As the prisoners were shuffled off toward the Intake wing, Egan stepped forward.

"One moment."

The two stormtroopers escorting the Barabel stopped and stepped back slightly, their blaster rifles pointed squarely at the Barabel's head.

"Identify yourself, Barabel." Egan ordered, his eyes locked with that of the Barabel's.

The Barabel only stared back at him, the narrowing of his emerald green eyes the only movement visible on his face.

"You will speak when talked to, scum." One of the stormtroopers stepped forward and slammed the butt of his rifle into the Barabel's back. The reaction elicited a grunt from the Barabel as he stumbled forward, but otherwise he stubbornly remained silent.

"Enough." Egan waved off the stormtrooper as he stepped forward, his icy blue eyes meeting those of the Barabel's. "If you don't speak, I will break you. Is that understood?"

The Barabel merely lifted his lips into a toothy smile.

"Very well." Egan's eyes narrowed. "Guards, take him to the interrogation chamber next to the Commandant Office and secure him there. This one... I will deal with *personally*."

"Yes sir!" The two stormtroopers said before they shoved the Barabel toward the turbolift.

Egan watched the trio leave, his mind already moving on to the procedures he would need to begin with. It had been some time since he undertook the interrogation and torturing of a prisoner, but he was sure he would pick it up quickly after he reviewed Barabel physiology. And the Barabel was a robust species, able to endure much.

Egan smiled, despite the bad feeling still lingering in his gut.

He was going to enjoy this, despite whatever bad feelings were conjured up.

**

Several weeks later...

The Barabel let out a small groan as the door slid down past the retreating Captain, his restraints preventing him from slumping down onto the floor, instead holding him rigid as the Imperial inflicted one torture after another on him. The stump of his tail was seared over, the heat still radiating into him from the hot iron that Egan applied to it after crudely cutting it off with an old fashioned hack saw.

But the Barabel never spoke, only feeding his defiance with his pain and rage.

It had helped to shunt off his pain and redirect it toward defying his captors. But the effort left an ongoing toil upon him, and now it felt as if he were burning up from within, particularly in his eyes, which were to feel like as if a blow torch was being applied to it, which the Barabel thought was strange considering that the Captain had left them alone. Not that it mattered in the end, he supposed.

But he would not break.

He would continue to defy, and seek escape, whenever possible.

He was-

The Barabel's groaning expression vanished into a faceless mask as the Captain re-entered the room, a curious humming sound coming from behind him.

He would *not* give the Captain the satisfaction of showing weakness.

That was unacceptable.

**

Captain Egan was a patient man, for the most part. It took quite a bit to rattle him and make him lose his composure. The Barabel, however...

The Barabel seemed impervious to all the methods he employed, from severing his tail, extracting each talon one by one, and various drugs and nerve agents. Oh, the Barabel screamed in pain, grunted, and groaned like any animal would, but he...

He refused to break.

Egan's lips curled back into a deep scowl as he stepped back to regard the bound Barabel, his mouth dribbling black ooze from the extracted teeth. And all the unknown Barabel did was stare back in his obstinate defiance.

"Alright, thing." Egan allowed a slight growl to touch his tone. "You played this game long enough, and it's long since lost its entertainment. It's time for the IT-O droid."

That elicited a low growl from the Barabel as the black spherical droid floated into view.

Egan's scowl transformed into a vicious smile. "Oh, you *have* heard of it. How very interesting. I'll be curious to find out how you know of that destination. In due time, of course. Your name, first."

The Barabel's eyes merely narrowed as he glared back at the Captain, his bleeding fingers clenching.

Egan's smile dropped slightly as he suddenly noticed the Barabel's eyes beginning to start taking on a very dim purplish glow.

But before he could step closer to investigate, klaxon alarms began to wail and the lighting shifted to a red tone as the operations center officer came over the loudspeaker.

"Red Alert, Red Alert, New Republic forces has entered the system. Activate evacuation procedures. All Imperial forces are to report to the hangar bays immediately! This is not a drill, repeat, this is not a drill!"

Egan growled out in frustration before turning to snarl at the Barabel.

"Your lucky day, Barabel. You're just going to die here."

With that, Egan stormed out to find out the situation and supervise the evacuation. Had he waited just a minute longer, he would have seen the Barabel's eyes erupt into purple flames, his scaly skin beginning to ripple and bulge out as he began to struggle against his restraints

**

"What's the situation, Lieutenant?" Egan barked out as he stormed into the Operations Center.

"Sir, we got two Mon Calamari cruisers and several Corellian Corvettes on an intercept course." Lt. Syai reported as he maneuvered around the station crewmembers beginning to wipe the computers and lay demolition charges. "They'll be here in a half hour at present speed. We will have the station wired in 10 minutes."

“Good.” Egan sighed to himself as he considered the loss of his command. “What about the workers?”

“We got several worker revolts occurring in Refinery Stations 3, 4 and 6. But our men managed to withdraw in good order and seal in the prisoners. They will die when the self-destruct activates.” Syai said as he glanced at a terminal screen. “Approximately 5 minutes before the New Republic reaches the station.”

“Alright, good.” Egan clapped his hand on Syai’s shoulder. “You did your job. Now get yourself and your men out, I’ll see you all at the rendezvous point and then we’ll get in touch with Imperial Command for further orders.”

“Yes sir!” Syai saluted before barking orders at the men, who picked up their pace.

Egan spun around and hurried back into the turbolift, slapping the button for the secondary hangar bay where his private shuttle was kept, fueled and ready for just an eventually.

It always paid to be prepared.

**

Within moments, Egan was in the shuttle and performing the pre-flight checks, as two stormtroopers stood guard just outside. The klaxons wailing out its mournful tone as the station computer began announcing its countdown to self-destruction at the ten minute mark. After a hurried few minutes, the checkout was complete and the shuttle was primed for launch. Egan smiled and turned to walk to the landing ramp.

“Alright guar-” He stopped as he suddenly noticed his two guards slumped on the ground, their necks clearly bent at unnatural angles.

Before Egan could reach for his blaster however, a huge force slammed into him and shoved him up against the wall before lifting upwards in a crushing choke. As he struggled to bring air past the crushing grip, Egan’s eyes slowly cleared of stars, and he soon stared into what appeared to be a pair of glowing hot coals.

After a few precious seconds, it dawned on him that he was being held up by a Barabel.

One seriously pissed off Barabel.

The Barabel’s glowing eyes narrowed slightly as he seemed to sniff the air, as if sensing his fear. After a few more seconds of silence, the Barabel let a rasping chuckle escape and spoke for the first time in a thick hissing accent.

"It appearz to be **your** unlucky day, Captain." The Barabel let a mocking smile touch his lips as he tightened his grip, eliciting a gurgling choke from Egan. "Since you were so interezeted in my name, it iz Zakath.

With that, the fearsome Barabel threw Egan out of the ship and back into the hangar bay with superhuman speed, not stopping until he slammed into the hangar wall. Pain exploded within him as he felt bones crack. He could only watch with stunned dismay as the shuttle meant for him began to take off, its wings unfolding into flight position as its engines began to flare, soon leaving the hangar bay and setting a course for deep space.

"Computer..." Egan croaked out as he slowly climbed to his feet, hot daggers of pain stabbing into him. "Add five minutes to self-destruct countdown... authorization Egan...Alpha.... Beta.... Five."

"Acknowledged. Self-destruct countdown is now at six minutes."

Egan groaned as he stumbled into the connecting walkway and headed toward the secondary hangar bay, his leg feeling as if it had a crack and impending break in it. Hopefully there was another ship that was still waiting for people that would now never come.

As he walked toward the hangar, Egan repeated a single name over and over.

"Zakath." Egan hissed slightly. "Zakath... I am not finished with you. I will find you. And I *will* break you."

He stumbled into the hangar bay and sighed with relief as he saw a single shuttle still remaining. Obviously its intended occupants were either dead or on another ship. Either way, it was now his.

But as he began to limp toward the transport, the station began to rock as the New Republic vessels opened fire.

No! Not now! Egan gritted his teeth and picked up his speed. But just before he reached the ramp leading into the transport, a massive explosion rocked the station, and a large pipe dislodged from the ceiling and crashed in front of Egan, barring his way. As he slid to a stop and stared in dismay at his blocked ship, the computer's calm voice came over the loudspeaker again.

"Self-destruct will occur in two minutes."

"No!" Egan snarled as he grabbed the edge of the large pipe and tried to shove it out the way. It stubbornly stayed put however. "No! Not like this!"

NOT! LIKE! THIS!

With a roar, Egan felt a surge of power flow through him, and an eyeblink later, he suddenly saw the pipe fly across the hangar bay to crash against the wall, clanging heavily as it slammed down to the floor. Egan stared at it in stunned amazement for a few seconds until the loudspeaker rang out again.

"Self destruct in sixty seconds."

Right. Time to leave. I can figure this out later.

**

Zakath let out a hissing groan as he stumbled into the refresher, having just sent the shuttle fleeing into hyperspace after narrowly avoiding the New Republic fleet closing in on the station.

Looking up at the mirror, Zakath could only stare in disbelief as a pair of violet eyes stared back at him, glowing brightly as if they were hot coals being stoked to a consuming burn. He stepped closer and examined his image, seeing no trace of his previously emerald green eyes.

"What... iz.... thiz?" He whispered to himself

But before he could think further, the pain of the torture he had undergone for the past several weeks combined with the stresses of his escape crashed into him, and the Barabel felt his mind give way under the blinding pain, and he felt his lungs erupt with an earth shattering howl as he instinctively lashed out. The cramped walls of the refresher suddenly exploded outward as the Barabel slammed his mind into them, as the pain fed his rage. The mirror exploded in a single gesture, sending millions of fragments flying all over the room, cutting gashes into Zakath as they whizzed past.

After several minutes of mindless rage, the Barabel began to calm down. As he did so, he could feel a strange sense of power flowing through him. It was a sweet feeling, promising strength and deliverance. It came to him after a few minutes of submerging himself in the sweet addicting feeling.

"...thiz iz the Force." Zakath whispered to himself as he rose to his feet.

And I want more. But how?

Zakath could feel a smile touch his ruined face as it came to him. He had been a bounty hunter- a successful one- and he counted among his steady clients were people who whispered of connections to a secretive cult of Force-users who paid handsomely for Jedi trophies, both living and mechanical.

Perhaps this cult would help.

Zakath nodded to himself as he lurched toward the cockpit..

...and Destiny.

**

A week later

Classified Imperial Intelligence location

“And that should cover everything leading up to your successful escape.” The plain agent concluded as he turned off the databad and looked mildly at the worn out person in front of him. “We just have one tiny bit of business to conclude, then you can move on.”

“What?” Egan asked wearily as he slumped back into the chair, a cup of caf in his hand.

“How did you escape Terok Nor? The real reason, this time.”

“...what are you saying?” Egan’s eyes sharpened as he stiffened up. “I told you everything I know.”

“No, you told us what you wanted us to hear.” The agent corrected him, a slight smirk touching his face. “We have agents watching you for some time now, Captain. Believe it or not, Intelligence has access to Force-sensitive personnel of our own, and they thought they sensed a tremor in you.”

“...and you didn’t bother to execute me?” Egan asked, a wary look on his face. “Isn’t that the law, agent?”

“It is.” The agent confirmed. “But as part of Intelligence work, we have distrection on what laws we follow. And we would like to make you an offer.”

Egan blinked.

“You can join us, and you will begin retrieving basic training in your new powers, along with infiltration training. We think you would make an extremely valuable field agent.”

“Or...?” Egan asked slowly, an eyebrow raised.

“You don’t leave this room alive.” The agent finished, his face back to an expressionless mask.

“Not much of a choice then.” Egan said after a long moment.

"Oh it's a choice." The agent replied, a slight smile ghosting across his lips. "It's just that the consequences aren't favorable."

"I see." Egan said as he considered the agent's words for a long moment. "Then I accept."

"Excellent choice." The agent congratulated, his smile widening. "However, I'm afraid Captain Egan is dead. He died heroically to prevent Terok Nor from falling in the hands of the New Republic. A brave sacrifice that will be remembered. You, on the other hand, will have many names with us."

"...and my name right now?"

"...Naradas."

Naradas.

He would use the name. And he would grow in power. And then he will begin his hunt for his quarry.

The Empire would not last forever, nor would Imperial Intelligence.

He would bide his time, serve his masters, and when the time was right, he would break his chains and begin hunting his prey.

Zakath would die. This, he promised.

Naradas smiled.