*Looking Back Again*

**Hapes Prime**

**Hapes Consortium Space**

**25 ABY**

The crimson, smoldering embers cast a haunting glow amid the barren field. Nightfall on Hapes Prime had always been a striking experience for the young man. The sound of the parties, the illicit dalliances of the well-to-do matriarchs, and the anguished screams of the lowly courtiers. Despite being of the upper-class, the young man knew the pain of scorn and ridicule. Fire, somehow, had a way of making all things equal in the gardens and fields of the luxurious parks and preserves of the jaded and decadent ruling order of the Hapes Consortium.

Zagro Fenn continued to watch the fire lap up the remains of his former home. The villa was modest for someone of the means of the Fenn House, but his family had always been unconventional if nothing else. Being a male offspring of a son of one of the heads of a powerful house was generally seen as a life of leisure known as disdain and modest indifference. Despite thousands of years of matriarchal rule, equality had made no strides for members of his sex. And for this, in a manner, Zagro’s life was now at an end.

Seeing his father die was one thing. Sitting on a meticulously maintained fence line a hundred yards away from the crumbling and buckling marble and durasteel villa, the thirteen year old, brown-haired boy did not weep. No, that would come later he surely knew. Being overwhelmed with emotion helped to keep the demons and memories at bay from moments previously. Those images would come to haunt him always, in due time.

“No one is coming?”, stated the bewildered adolescent. His words came out as an affirmation. Muffled as they were, the impact of the words carried a weight and presence uncanny from such a young source. “No, my master, but we are leaving”, came the forceful yet respectful response. Old Fertzwenk always was a dutiful body servant, and the duty to protect Lieutenant Artimorus Fenn’s son had fallen to him. It was not a question of if Matriarch Xenthil’s hit squad would come, but only of when. For the senior Fenn had committed a grievous crime; being a prideful and upstanding man in a society of women.

When the female assassins came, their work was swift and methodical. Only the coded warning had arrived in time for the old servant and the young master to flee while the women cut down each servant, slave, and attendant to a man. Including Zagro’s father.

The boy looked up at the older Hapan male, puzzled. He began to spoke, thought better of it, paused then started in earnest. “Fertzwenk, where will we go that they will not find us and hunt us down like they did my father? Not even his position on the Queen Mother’s flagship protected him…”, his words failed him. The older companion put an arm around the boy, and urged him forward as the sound of an approaching shuttle became audible over the exotic imported treetops. “That it did not, young master, but your father had friends. And you are going off-world. Be strong, and avenge your father boy. One day you will return honor to your father and our sacrifice.” Fentzwenk smiled meekly to the child as he coached the words forth, hoping the boy wouldn’t read the despair and hopelessness in his voice.

The shuttle had landed. It was an older model, one that Zagro had seen many times at the training academies for Hapan Royal Navy cadets located nearby. He had hopes of one day attending, and continuing the trailblazing efforts his father had accomplished. But, that was not to be. Fenn embraced his old acquaintance, knowing from the pre-coordinated drills of the past six months this day might come. “Maybe they are coming to bring me to the academy so I can command one of the Battle Dragons?” Zagro’s words were foolish, but they hit their mark. The old man sighed and eyed his charge as the young man clambored up the landing ramp of the shuttle. “Young master, the next time you come to Hapes you will be tearing those vessels apart.” Zagro did not hear. He was inside the shuttle crying softly.

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**Hutt Space**

**13 Years Later**

**VT-49 Decimator *Ardent***

The medical bay consisted of a reclining examination table the size of a metal framed collapsible chair. Major Fenn wondered if not having any stock of advanced medical supplies was a mistake, however, there would be no way to store them at any rate.

Doc was diligently examining the Hapan male. As far as medical droids go, Fenn was pleased to have one with an acquired sense of duty and friendship. After all the years on the run, the Hapan had wishes he had a caring hand to look after him. The 2-1B was a relic of a model, joints rusting and having issues with keeping heavily injured patients alive. Still, Zagro had promised the bucket of bolts that once he gained his freedom those who had helped him would be rewarded. Keeping the droid was an odd choice, as even standing he took up much space on the cramped vessel.

“Just cauterize the damn thing Doc” screamed the stricken Fenn. His vessel, as with himself, had taken a savage beating as of late to enemy fighter pilot patrols. Sneaking back into the Hapes Consortium would be highly improbable for the vessel. They needed a window of opportunity that would not materialize.

And at that, 2-1B stopped his bloody work and walked to the far bulkhead and retrieved a scrap of metal, the size of a small handball. “I do not have time for your idiosyncrasies you mute contraption! Just seal this damn wound.” As he said the words, the Hapan instantly felt a slight pain of guilt stabbing his gut. He was always hard on those he cared about and had allowed into his trust. The droid pushed his arm forward and presented the metal object.

“Why…how did you…how could you have known…it was so long ago…” Fenn trailed off. He gently picked up the crude and rudimentary sculpting of a Hapan Battle Dragon capital ship, fashioned painstakingly from a cauterizing appendage of 2-1B. Fenn looked at the droid. The droid that had consoled him in the sick bay of the Battle Dragon he had stowed away on and helped his cover so many years ago. “When I was a boy all I wanted was to fly one of these. And now we are back, Doc. Between the Transitory Mist and the damn patrol screens we may not see one on this mission, but I am glad you are here with me.” Fenn turned his head, and bit his lip hard to push aside the feeling of coming tears. Tears he had not shed since so long ago.