

PAPERCUT

By: MARICK ARCONAE #10214

19ABY

Hapes Cluster

The Planet Hapes: Marketplace

13:01

The vibrant sun was in full bloom overhead. The central market buzzed with energy. Nobles moved primly through the various merchant stands, flashing gems and jewelry while laughing and exchanging pleasantries. The shuffling of footsteps on stone combined with the ambiance to make the whole place seem alive.

Then again, anything that wasn't his closet seemed alive to Marick Del'Abbot, bastard child and whipping boy of House Del'Abbot. At thirteen years old, Marick was short and gangly with waifish arms and hollowed cheeks. His medium length black hair was ruffled haphazardly due to being cut with a knife instead of scissors. Marick wasn't allowed to get hair cuts, so he had to try it himself in the reflection of the cracked mirror he kept in the closet. Some strands stuck up and to the sides while others were simply shorter in length.

Combined with his tattered shirt, pants, and slippers with a hole that let his big toe stick out, Marick hardly looked like the son of a Consortium member. The only thing that stood out on the boy's body was his eyes. They were a vibrant, attentive shade of blue that almost seemed unnaturally sharp.

Marick carried a bag over his shoulder, securing the items he had been sent to gather for his sister. He had triple checked to make sure he got everything on the list. Any one thing he messed up would end up in a lash. She'd probably still find something he messed up, but he at least felt better knowing that he had done everything possible to minimize the punishment.

The mixture of smells from the various vendors caused Marick's stomach to grumble against his will. He had managed to steal a few scraps from the dirty trays outside the kitchen, but had made the entire walk to the market without so much as stopping for a drink of water or snack. Not that he

could afford something like that, but there were some berries on the side of the road he could have foraged and hoped not to get sick from. There wasn't time, unfortunately.

His throat was parched, but Marick was having problems finding the usual vendor that would let him use the wash-hose to get a quick drink. The best thing he saw was a trough of water that was used to feed one of the vendors exotic looking creatures that they used to tote their carts and wares. Marick wasn't sure why they would use animals instead of some kind of speeder, but who was he to question such things?

Leaning over the trough Marick cupped his hand and shoveled some of the water into his mouth. It was brackish and tasted foul, but he winced and drank it anyway. When he pulled up, the eyes of a tall, burly woman stood over him. She wore leathers of various treatment with straps criss-crossing her barrel like torso. She did not look pleased, and held a wooden club in on one hand and patted it against her palm.

Marick bolted, ducking under a swing from the merchant's club. "Come back here you little rat, I'll skin you!"

Marick bumped into a tall trader's legs, spinning awkwardly and landing on the stone to scrape his knee. Wincing, he scrambled back to his feet and continued to run.

A cart drawn by some kind of creature plopped across the street. Adrenaline flaring, the small boy felt something ignite inside of him as he leapt over the cart, somersaulted, and landed in a roll on the other side of the cart. He blinked a few times, but there was no time to figure out what had happened.

"Pst, over here," a voice called out from a nearby alley. The voice was male, so something inside of Marick told him that it could probably be trusted over the angry woman chasing him. He scampered over to the alley, panting and heaving.

He found himself huddled next to a taller boy with spiky blonde hair and the telltale strong jawline of a Hapan. He wore a ripped graphic t-shirt and leather coat with pants that clung tightly to his lean legs.

"Shh," the older boy said, his bright green eyes keeping an eye on the street. Marick hugged his knees to his chest and tried to get his breathing under control.

“Ok, I think ol’ Marcy got tired out. What’d you try and do, take one of her fruits?”

“No, I was just...” Marick shook his head and flushed with embarrassment. He could feel the boy’s eyes on him, but kept his own eyes pointedly on the ground.

“Names Percival,” the boy said, extending a hand to help Marick up. “But everyone calls me Percy.

“I’m Marick.”

The two boys shook hands. Percy leaned against the wall and assumed a casual stance.

“Thanks for the save. I have to get going, though. I owe you, though.” Marick said with a slight bow.

“Wait, hold up. You’re clearly not like the rest of those pampered lap dogs that hang around the Consortium. I can see it in you, there is a rebel hiding in there!”

Marick looked away, not sure how to answer that. There was no rebelling against his family. He simply did what he was told, and tried to minimize the punishments that were handed his way.

“Anyway, have you ever heard of the band Lothal Park?!”

“Um, no...”

“Man, they’re amazing. They are a group from offworld. Their frontman can scream like no one I’ve ever seen, and they have another guy who accompanies him with these *sick* rhythms. Most of the lyrics are anti-Patriarchy, too, and they just, you know, get us! Even though they’re Twi’leks,” Percy nodded, folding his arms across his chest.

“Oh,” Marick said as he glanced back and forth nervously. “Wouldn’t that...be frowned upon here?”

“Oh, obviously. But the show is *super* secret. The Bisdale Pirates have been sending out false reports and making the Police chase a bunch of dead-end

leads. They were able to get the band past the vanguard fleet and are hoping the show will help raise awareness for the underground movement.”

“Oh. That sounds...hopeful,” Marick offered before he jumped in place at a loud noise from off to the side of the alley. It was just a merchant unloading a sack of foodstuffs. He relaxed, but fidgeted with the strap of his bag.

“Yea, so, you’re totally gonna be there tonight, right?”

“I um, don’t think so.”

“Oh but come on! 30 Seconds to Corellia is even opening for them!”

“Who?”

“You don’t know 30 Seconds to Corellia? What about the Rancortours? Panic! At the Waltz? Lekkucllock?” Perry realized he wasn’t leaning against the wall anymore and quickly returned to his stance, coughing into his hand before grinning.

“No...” Marick replied shyly, looking down at his feet.

“Nine Inch Daggers, Sum 42, Wince-182, 48 Degrees?” Percy rattled off the names excitedly at first but then deflated at the lack of recognition from Marick.

“N-No...? What do the numbers mean, anyway?” Marick asked as he looked back up at Perry and tilted his head.

“Oh, I don’t know, it’s just, you know, their band names, man! Don’t overthink it.”

“Okay.” Marick nodded a few times.

“Right then, so, see you tonight at the warehouse?”

“I guess. I can try—”

“That’s the spirit! See you there!” Percy punched Marick on the shoulder in what he assumed was a fun manner. Marick winced as the taller boy’s knuckles hit a still tender bruise he hid under his shirt. Percy didn’t pick up on it, but handed Marick something that fit in his palm.

“Oh and don’t forget, you need to dress “cool”, nothing fancy! Later kid!”

Marick watched him go, rubbing his arm and looking down at his tattered clothing. “That shouldn’t be too hard,” he whispered to himself.

Hapes: Del’Abbot Estate

18:00

Hapes did not have a “night”. In the evenings, it could grow cooler, but the Hapan adhered strictly to a numerical time measurement that mirrored what was found in other systems beyond the Hapes Cluster.

Marick turned the data-cd Percy had given him around in his hands. The label was the picture of a Twi’lek holding a microphone that projected a glowing light-sword that pointed threateningly at the carichariter of Matriarch Queen. He knew that he would get in huge trouble if anyone found it, but he didn’t care. He had used the quasy-broken holoplayer Allister had given him. It was his only item of value, so he kept it hidden. He had popped the CD in and listened to *Lothal Park* on repeat. The lyrics seemed to speak directly to him, somehow. As if the singer understood the struggle Marick faced everyday.

The boy had never felt like this before. For the first time in his young life, he felt like he had *something* to believe in. He also knew this meant he *had* to figure out how to get to the show. Marick expected it to be dusk by now, which gave him some more time. He never got dinner with everyone else, so he never really could tell. Checking the wall chrono in the corridor, he was surprised that it was later than he imagined.

Afraid he would miss the show, Marick left his holoplayer on the table outside his room, in the open. He was too focused on making it to the trash compactor room, where he could access a loose vent and make his way off the estate grounds.

Hapes Outskirts: Warehouse

20:00

Marick kept his hands in his pockets as he gingerly approached the door to the warehouse. He wore the same clothes he had earlier in the market, but no one seemed to mind. The older boy sitting at the table outside had a small metal box and a set of wrist bands he was giving out to anyone that asked.

At his sides, two men dressed in assorted leather and weaponry stood on guard. One had a set of macrobinoculars around his neck, and the other a walkie-talkie of some kind. Each had a blaster rifle of some kind Marick wasn't able to identify. These must have been members of the Bisadle Pirates.

Marick stepped up to the line, and waited for three people in front of him to pass.

"100 credits please," the door-boy asked.

"I um, don't have anything," Marick said sheepishly. He hadn't realized that you had to pay to see the show. He felt his heart sink.

The boy looked him over, frowned, but then nodded.

"First time out?"

Marick nodded once, eyes downcast.

The boy motioned for Marick to hold out his hand, and adorned one of the bracelets on his wrist. Marick looked up with wide eyes. The boy simply smiled.

"I remember my first show too. Go enjoy," he said with a dismissive wave.

Marick smiled from ear to ear, excitement bubbling in his chest. He almost started to cry, but fought against it as he passed through the doors and into the warehouse.

The warehouse had blacked out all the windows, plunging the whole building into darkness. Fortunately, the small impromptu stage had a few steps of tall lights that were illuminating the room with different colors and effects. The air was an amalgamation of familiar and foreign smells: herbal, tabac, and incense mixed with sweat and humidity. There was barely room to stand, but he could see a bunch of technicians working on setting up the various instruments.

Marick was anxious as he looked around at the other people who all talked excitedly with one another. He had expected to be out of place with his ragged clothing, but everyone seemed to be wearing similar. For once, Marick didn't feel completely out of place. One boy, who was larger than

any he'd seen before and had a scraggly beard and a shirt stained with sweat, turned and looked Marick over.

"Killer garb, bro," he said before turning back to the group of people he was with.

"Er, thanks..." Marick said quietly to himself.

The lights cut out. Cheers broke out. Marick panicked momentarily, thinking something had gone wrong. Then the lights snapped back on and Lothal Park took the stage. Marick held his breath.

Without preamble, a crash of percussion kicked off an alternating guitar rift. The player hammered away at the strings, filling the warehouse with a familiar tune that Marick had listened to no less than seven times that day along.

*Why does it feel like night today?
Something in the air's not right today
Why am I so uptight today?
Paranoia's all I got left*

An electronic beat and percussion filled the space between verses as the crowd began to *move*. Marick felt himself being squished between the large boy he had seen earlier and another pair jumping up and down. His immediate reaction was to retreat to safety, but he watched as they others seemed to be *encouraging* the pushing back and forth. Then one of them went down and held out their hands like a foothold. Another boy used it as a springboard and launched up into the top of the crowd.

Marick gasped slightly, but the boy was caught by a sea of hands that guided him forward. Before Marick could investigate the phenomenon further, he felt another shove on his shoulder. Without thinking, he pushed back, and to his surprise was greeted with laughter. The boy he pushed put an arm around Marick's shoulder, shouting out the lyrics.

The lead singer stepped forward, his voice ignited like a thunderclap.

*CRAWLING IN MY SKIN
THESE WOUNDS THEY WILL NOT HEAL*

“Fear is how I fall!” Marick screamed at the top of his lungs. “Confusing, world, is reaaaaal!” His voice was drowned out, but he didn’t care. Marick felt alive for the first time in his life. He had–

An elbow slammed into Marick’s solar plexus, knocking the wind from his lungs. He cried out wordlessly, mouth gaping as panic rushed through him. To his surprise, one of the boys nearby pulled him backwards and created a kind of ward with his forearm. “Just chill man. Just chill!” the boy yelled over the music.

Marick nodded and waited it out. It wasn’t long before he could say “Thank you,” but the boy had already pushed away and rejoined the mob-like crowd that was getting more and more rowdy. He smiled as he started towards the pile.

Glass shattered. Chaos erupted. Light poured into the warehouse from outside as the glass windows continued to shatter and the power to the stage was cut. Air-propelled canisters flew through the warehouse, clinking against the hard stone floor and then hissing as they started to release gas. Screams and cries of protest swelled into a cacophony of terror.

Marick started to cough as the gas reached him. His eyes began to water and he fell to his knees. He would have cried, but he was slowly becoming numb with shock.

A squad of police officers, all female and all clad in tight body armor kicked in the warehouse door and started firing blaster rounds into the air. They blew whistles and started to round up anyone they could get their hands on, clasping stun-cuffs on them. A few people tried to fight back, but were gunned down with stun-bolts to the chest.

Another boy had his arm broken a few feet away from Marick, and the boy that had helped him earlier started to shout “Down the Matriacrch!–” but was quickly silenced with a chop to the throat and a knee to the gut.

Marick’s vision started to blur. The last thing he saw was a hand grabbing him by the hair and dragging him out of the warehouse. He tried to cry out, but knew it was futile when he realized who had grabbed him. The officer pulled off her mask, revealing bright blue eyes like Marick’s and long blond hair tied back into a tail.

Angelica Del'Abbot was as lovely as she was cruel. Her lips curled into a wicked grin. "Thanks for the tip, little brother. We never would have found this without you."

Before she struck his head with enough force to render him unconscious, Marick noted his holoplayer attached to her belt. He remembered leaving it out. Crippling dread washed over him as his world faded to black.

-X-

Dajorra System

Arcona Citadel

Selen

34ABY

Marick stared at the ceiling, remembering.

His long black hair looked perfectly combed, even in bed. He had come a long way since his time as a lanky youth, fully filling in the soft tank top and loose fitting pants he wore under the covers. His eyes were still the same vibrant blue, but carried a weight of knowing that seemed to weigh down on lines of fatigue under his eyes.

At his side, Atyiru's hair was splayed out like an additional pillow behind her head. She was on her back, mouth open as she very faintly snored, arms splayed to the sides. Marick smiled at the sight, and carefully slipped out of bed and made his way over to the desk he had kept in their joint quarters.

Ivoshar had grown too big to fit on the bed with them, so he had taken up his perch in his own oversized bed Atyiru had bought for him at the foot of it. The Cythraul lifted his head and regarded Marick curiously, noticed the vacancy on the bed and silently (somehow) crawled onto the bed and curled up next to Atyiru in Marick's place.

Marick narrowed his eyes at the Cythraul, who lifted one ear, then lowered it before closing his eyes and going back to sleep.

Shaking his head, Marick pulled open one of the drawers and pulled out an old holoplayer with a cracked screen.

He turned it over in his hands and placed it down on the desk. He reached back into the drawer and pulled out a sleeve that held a data-cd and a note. Marick unfolded the note.

His younger sister was nothing like his older one. The last time Marick had been to Hapes, he had killed Angelica and imprisoned his mother, turning over control of the Del'Abbot estate to his younger sister, Alexa. They still talked every so often, but both were busy with their own respective troubles.

Marick looked at the data-cd, that simply had the name written in black marker:

Papercut - Lothal Park

The Hapan slid the disk into the old holoplayer, plugged in a set of headphones, and smiled as the familiar music filled his ears. He sat at the desk, listening, and again lost track of time.