

## Training Days

*Aphran IV*  
*Aphran System*  
*Inner Rim*

It'd been a long day for the diminutive Ryn, his body ached and his skin itched under the fine hair that covered him. He was covered head to toe in sawdust and sweat, the humid environment just made things worse as he made his way to the flophouse assigned to the unskilled workers. He'd ran out of money for passage weeks ago and summarily tossed off the transport he'd been traveling on, the Captain having little patience for a fourteen year old Ryn offering to do menial tasks in exchange for further travel. Thus he'd ended up getting dumped on Aphran IV, a planet that seemed to produce nothing but wood everything. And it was disgustingly warm to the young Ryn.

Kordath sighed as he walked into the common quarters he'd been given in exchange for working. Glares from the other sentients did little to slow him down as he headed for the refresher, it'd been a year on his own away from his nomadic Ryn family, the casual racism was easy enough to ignore. It was the more direct, violent variety that made life difficult, but so far the locals didn't seem to care, wrapped up in their artisan crafts. As long as he was bringing in lumber they didn't care, and one or two of them hadn't seemed to mind him observing while he took a breather. He was fairly certain he could at least carve half decent products if they'd let him.

Ten minutes later he was lying on his bunk, clean and somewhat cooler, the flophouse having a rudimentary cooling system. Nothing like the more ornate buildings in the city though it seemed the further from the central area he got, the less they cared about comfort. Being on the edge of the city was rough, but at least he was making some credits. Bleu hadn't made any long term plans, simply bouncing from planet to planet and finding work as he could the past year to stay on the move, a holdover from his childhood. His family had never stayed anywhere more than a couple of months before the locals would start getting that look in their eyes that made the nomadic folk wary.

Now it was a matter of hoarding credits until he could get offworld again. Except the flophouse charged a rent, there was no where to store food where other workers wouldn't end up pilfering it, and even the refresher required a few credits deposited before the bloody thing would run. At the rate he was going it would be a year before he could get off this humid rock, and that was torture to the young, wanderlust stricken Ryn. His stomach rumbled and he sighed, he'd been trying to save his money and live off mostly water, at least the public fountains were free. It had to have been two or three days since he'd had proper solid food, and his production today had dropped because of it, which meant his payout had suffered.

With a grunt, his muscles protesting, he stood and went to leave the bunkhouse in search of a cheap meal. A group of the workers coming in glared at him and blocked his path, forcing him to go around them as they sneered.

“Little rodent.”

“Thieves, the lot of them.”

His ears burned as he moved on, doing his best to ignore the jibes. Head down, the Ryn left the building and started down the jungle paths that would lead further into the city. The entire place was built in and around the trees, it was really the most breathtaking world he'd been to in his life. At fourteen years of age many would assume that was not saying much, but for the nomad's childhood, and the year since leaving his family, it meant it stood out against a backdrop of a hundred worlds. Gravel crunched under his feet as he walked down the path, idly wondering why the Aphrans didn't pave the paths that lead to the resources they used for their only exports. Perhaps something about marring the natural beauty, he supposed.

Streams of light lit the path, the lamps spaced along dark yet in the mid afternoon, but already the sunlight was turning everything to shades of red. It would be dark by the time he found affordable foods and made it back to the flophouse. That was fine, less people seemed to take note of the short Ryn when the lights had faded, a naturally light step and a steady pace made him but a shadow in the night. As he let his thoughts wander civilization grew closer, the trees thinning out to give way to organized chaos of markets and homes alike. Most of the cityfolk pointedly ignored the lone, short and fuzzy teenager as he stared through windows at things he knew he'd never afford. A particularly snazzy looking jacket hung in the window of a clothing shop, black dyed Nerf hide with a few buckles and wide shoulders. Kordath was certain he'd at least look taller if he wore something like that, and sighed as he tried to ignore his own travel worn clothing.

A nearby diner caught his nose as scents wafted out the open kitchen door, cooking meat and vegetables alike mingling to draw him closer. As he started to walk that way, his mouth already watering and his eyes locked onto his target he failed to spot a portly Human who collided with him from the side. Even as he tried to utter apologies, despite it likely not being his fault, Kordath felt a meaty hand grab him by the back of his shirt and haul him up into the air. Seemed the man was not just fat, but strong.

“Oi, what do we have here then, a would be pickpocket!?” shouted the man, spittle flying. Kordath tried to pull his shirt from his neck, the fabric slowly cutting off his ability to breath. “Try and take MY wallet will you, vermin!”

Bleu struggled, trying to explain to the man that he'd only been walking, when a green skin, tattoo covered man stepped up and place a hand on the Human's arm. “Sir, I'm so sorry, but I

believe our young friend was seeing more with his stomach than his eyes. I fear this was truly an accident, that and you're turning him from gray to blue, it would be terrible if you killed a boy in the streets I should think."

The Human glared down at the lithe Mirialan and dropped the Ryn, spitting at the dirty, sweat stained teen. Kordath covered his face as the glob slapped him in the arm, shuddering in disgust. The big man plodded away with heavy steps, nose up in the air.

"Racist," the Ryn heard his green savior mutter, before the man reached down and helped him to his feet. "You okay, kiddo?"

"Uhm, yes, sir, thank you, uhhh..."

"Tass Kinder, at your service," spoke the man with a bow. Kordath gaped, uncertain of what to make of the man. "Wanderer, performer, and seeker of fortunes. Now me thinks you were about to obtain for yourself a meal, yeah?"

Bleu blinked, noting that this 'Tass' person's entire speech pattern and voice changed from sentence to sentence. "Y..yes sir, I was, before the pink mass of flab and anger ran me over."

This time it was the Mirialan who looked taken aback, before breaking into a grin, "Deal with his kind quite a bit, I'm sure. Well, so happens our friend is also our benefactor today."

Tass tossed a pouch into the air and caught it again with an audible clink of credits.

"Wait, when, how, is that his?" hissed the Ryn.

His only reply was a wink as Kinder turned to head towards the nearby diner.

Kordath sat dumbfounded, watching him walk, until Tass looked over his shoulder and called out to him.

"Thought you was hungry, lad, come along and get a proper meal for once. Might add some inches ta ya, eh?"

Two hours and several plates later Bleu leaned back in his seat, staring up at the ceiling. He was full. For the first time in months, he'd ate till he couldn't eat anymore. The entire time Tass had grinned and watched him shovel food into his face, he didn't care, a free meal *never* came along.

"On your own, then? Not a usual sight, a lone Ryn."

Kord yawned and fought the urge to take a nap, straightening in his chair to give the green man his attention. "Uh, yeah, had to leave home. Things, umm. Things."

Tass nodded knowingly, toying with some strange, bite sized bit of fried cheese before abruptly tossing it across the table at the Ryn. With barely a thought to the action the lethargic Bleu snatched it out of the air.

"Quick reflexes, how've you been getting by?"

Kordath shrugged, "Work is found if you try hard enough, don't always pay great. Done a few ship cleaning gigs to get from one place to another, sometimes somebody takes pity and lets you on just as long as you do something useful. Other times you get the lonely pilot who wants somebody to travel with them and chat."

"So, hard, honest work?"

"Pretty much, why?"

"Sounds dreadfully boring," spoke the Mlrialan with a small smile, "you're quick of wit and hand, my boy. You'd go far in certain lines of work."

"Do...do you mean what you did outside? *Stealing?*" whispered Kord, leaning forward.

"You say it like it's a crime!"

"It...it is a crime, mister Kinder."

"Alright, first off, call me Tass. Secondly, you gotta get out of that mindset, buddy, or you're gonna be hauling lumber for the next five years trying to get off this rock. Third, you good to move quick with that full belly of yours, kid?"

"I, what, huh? Wait move fast?"

"Yup, our flabby friend seems to be returning, and I do believe those gentleman behind him in the uniforms are security."

"Oh gods what do we do, mister Kinder?"

"Tass, I told ya, call me Tass. Now come on, they've got a back door we can slip out of."

"You've been here before?" asked the Ryn in confusion.

“Kid, stick with me a while, you’ll figure out all these joints got a back door. Stick with me for a while longer than that, and you’ll never go hungry again, yeah? Now come on, we gotta run. But not till we’re out the back, act casual for now, eh? Let’s roll.”

Kordath followed his new friend...mentor? out through the kitchen and broke into a run. He couldn’t help but feel a small bit of guilt for eating on the fat man’s dime, but part of him could feel a rising rush of excitement as well.

Beat the hell out of chopping wood.