

STAR WARS

THE MAQOR STUNT

By Jack Freeman
(Bale Andros - 826)

His armor sinking deep in the insultingly cushy chair, Bale Andros kicked his boots over the desktop sending flecks of crusted mud and grass over the pristine surface. The Zabrak scowled. He never much cared for a tidy appearance but he had to admit it was a shame to soil the furniture. Everything here was so neat and orderly, more than it had any right to be what with a war going on outside. A far cry from the way things were back on *the Reek*. He shrugged. There was no helping it now. After all, what's done is done. A man can only roll with the punches.

"This is outrageous!" barked the Elayan commander sitting opposite of him. The blond man—a boy really—tried to slap his hand on the table, but a pair of hands to the shoulders kept him in place. His hand instead met his thigh to less than impressive results.

"You'd be surprised how often I hear this, Commander," Bale cooed as a shimmer of glass caught his eye from inside the desk. He leaned over to it. "What's your name, boy?"

The man swallowed hard, "San Kornal, Commander of the Third Inf—"

"Yeah. Figured that part out already," explained the Zabrak as he popped his new-found drink open. "You wouldn't be sitting here if I didn't. You'd be kneeling in your piss with your friends outside. Hey! This isn't bad stuff. How kind of you."

Bale threw his head back, bottle to his lips. He downed it in three loud, greedy gulps. Over his shoulder went the bottle and the hulking Zabrak smacked his lips. The Weequay mercenary holding the commander down snickered.

"Good stuff."

San Kornal shot a sidelong glance towards the door. It was pretty clear he wasn't making it out of there. Not with the Weequay towering over him and the Rodian lass guarding the door. *He knows this. No. He's worried about his troops.*

"Not a one dead," Bale assured him.

"But that blast..."

"My guys are pros. Disabled your comms, rattled you good, but it's all temporary I assure you. One of your techs can get it back online with two shakes of a hip."

The commander seemed to regain some semblance of ease and confidence. He said nothing, of course, but he sat that much straighter. Well, as straight as one managed with a leather-faced brute pressing down on them. *That's ok, get comfortable,* Bale thought. Slipping his feet off the table, the Zabrak got up with what he hoped was a brotherly smile on his face. He could never be sure. People always seemed to see the brute before the smile. It had to be the horns. Maybe the beard?

San Kornal did not shrink back.

Good start.

"So here's the deal. I'm sure you realise by now we didn't kick your door down for cushy seats and decent liquor. See, I've got me an itch and you're gonna scratch it."

"And what might that itch be?" The commander's tone had changed. Gone was the scandalized, high-pitched squeal, replaced by something Bale could at least begin to respect. The Zabrak mercenary didn't answer right away. He was quite content letting the lad stew. Their eyes locked. *I'm quite serious, boy.*

Bale smacked his lips again, "Damned shame your stash was so meager."

A decidedly and delightfully devilish grin split San Kornal's mouth. He prodded his chin towards a wall panel just behind Bale. "Press. Slide left. Harder."

There was a mechanical hiss and the panel swished open. Bale stuck his head inside.

"My man!" The Zabrak pulled out two bottles and sat back down at the desk. That there was quality, infinitely better than that flat swill from the desk. Not that Bale was in the business of picky drinking. Anything that burned his throat was good enough, after all, but smooth was smooth.

He uncorked the bottles, slid one across the desk. The Zabrak nodded and the Weequay retreated back against the wall, leaving the big boys to discuss.

Free, San Kornal shrugged his shoulders, made himself comfortable, sitting back every bit as relaxed as Bale. He snatched the bottle up and stole one shy sip.

"Come on! I thought we were making friends here, San! At first, I admit I took you for an uptight army boy. You've been convincing me otherwise, don't ruin it now!"

The commander allowed himself a chuckle, and threw the bottle back for a proper drink.

"Alright! Good! You've convinced me to let you help me," Bale motioned. The Rodian left her post at the door and approached. She moved with the kind of feminine grace one might expect from a Twi'lek, not this bug-eyed race. Bale never got used to it. She leaned in lazily before the commander, sliding him a datapad.

"Thanks Kayloo," said Bale.

"What's this?" The commander lifted the device. As Bale expected, his eyebrows first crumpled down as he read the first part, then right back up with a healthy dose of shock by the time he finished.

"My employers are *very* generous. You should see what I'm getting out of this," Bale took a swig and then stabbed the bottle towards the Weequay, "Hell, Krux here's finally getting himself a new ship! Been meaning to step out from my shadow for a while. I tell you, I much prefer that than him sticking me in the back and taking mine. Don't you?"

"Yeah, I reckon I do," acquiesced San, "So. Withdraw the troops. Win big, huh?"

"Just about. Ain't no need for me to pound someone or fire a shot. Not usually my style but hey, I'm feeling a touch tired today. I'll take the easy path."

Will you?

San Kornal said nothing for a while. He just sat there with nonchalance, bottle in one hand, datapad in the other, eyes locked down on it. Had to be weighing his options, Bale figured. Withdrawing his troops wouldn't sit well with his superiors. That was dead certain. He'd have to spin a damn good tale lest he end up standing at barrel's end of a firing brigade. He could see the muscles on the boy's head working hard.

Bale climbed to his feet, head tilted back, greasy hair falling over his shoulders as he downed the rest of the bottle, foam escaping down his beard. Finished, he let out one nice resounding burp.

"Easy sounds good," started the commander as he too pushed to his feet, "But I do so love a challenge!"

Bold. The boy kicked his chair back into the Weequay before he could pounce, then threw his outstretched hands out. Bale swore through clenched teeth as an invisible hand ripped his Bryar pistol right out of its holster. He tried to snatch it mid-air. A futile notion. In the blink of an eye, San Kornal stood before them, Bryar pistol trained on Bale, the Rodian's own blaster aimed at her. Another blink and twin blaster bolts lit the room red. The blast caught Bale in the chest, knocked him clean off his feet and over that ridiculous chair. He couldn't breathe, could barely move. The smell of carbonized plasteel filled his nostrils.

So focused was Kornal on Bale that his offhand shot had missed Kayloo. Some stupid luck, that. She sprung. Krux hurled the chair out of his way. They came at the commander together. They moved in unison more like dancing partners than fighters. They were on him so soon, Kornal could do nothing but jettison his blasters. He met them head on. He was good, damn strong, and so quick. Moved like a lightning bolt. They barreled him with punches and kicks but he fended them off with seeming ease. A spinning round kick drew distance between San and his assailants. Up he went. Before they could so much as squawk, his boots whipped them off their feet. Krux kissed the wall, Kayloo the floor.

But the Elayan commander had not yet landed that the world came rushing up at him like a battering ram. Down he went, Bale crashing atop with all his weight, upended desk cruelly sandwiched between them. The boy may have had the Force with him, but he could do nothing against the force of an oncoming freight train. There was a sickening crunch.

San's head stuck out gasping and wheezing from under the edge of the desk. Specks of his blood glimmered against the underside of the desk. *Damned shame*. The Zabrak pushed himself to his feet slowly, laboriously, his chest throbbing. His hand fished up the Bryar pistol. Then, he stood over the boy.

"Please," was all the Elayan commander could muster.

"Bad choice, San." A burst of red lit the room. Then, silence.

"Wasn't the plan, boss." Krux moaned.

Bale looked down at the blackened scorch mark on his breastplate, still smoldering.

"What's done is done."

A man can only roll with the punches.