

Norval II
Calaron Sector

It was a small village on Norval's second orbital body that had put out the call. A beast had been terrorizing it for generations, appeased by sacrifices from the community. Details were scant; it had been a simple distress call for 'a valiant warrior' to assist in ridding the township of its monstrous problem. A silver, gleaming ship lowered itself into a cleared out field on the edge of the village, a small comm array signaling that this was, in fact, the landing zone for the settlement.

The J-Type Nubian craft, *Ladies Delight* settled on its landing struts, shining in the sun as its boarding ramp lowered. Several locals gathered near the edge of the clearing, watching for any signs of who these visitors may be.

"Don't you dare slink off yet, Lily!" came an authoritative voice from inside the ship, just as a pink-skinned Zeltron woman in a crouch appeared to the onlookers, a wince on her face. "You can have plenty of time trawling the village for fun *after* you've finished your shipboard duties!"

The woman, dressed in brown short-shorts and a crop top adorned with checkered patterns up their sides, seemed to pout and stood up, stamping a foot on the ramp in frustration.

"Buuuuut Chaaaaan! We've been cooped up since Selen! And I already cleaned everything the Captain will let me touch! Unless you convinced him to let me into his room again," she added, sounding hopeful. Lily bent at the waist to look under the ship, out towards the town and the villagers watching, waving at them with a smile. If Lily was aware of the eyeful she was giving them, she either didn't care or knew full well what she was doing. "Hiya! Captain will be right with ya!"

A Human male dressed in a suit possibly older than the village itself stepped forward from the crowd, a set of thin spectacles resting on his pointed nose.

"Young lady, please bring your Captain out immediately! I would know why we have uninvited guests to the township of Haven!"

"This is a town? Seems small for that designation," came a fresh voice, another woman in similar attire stomping down the ramp with determination. She was taller than the Zeltron, who's skin tone she shared as the markings on the blue-skinned Togruta's montrals and lekku. The woman cracked her knuckles as she took up station at the bottom of the ramp, just to the side of the entrance. "Looks old enough that it should be a town by now," she added, glancing over the low rooftops made of thatch and wood, to the prefab in the center. It looked like an old colony base. She glanced back over her shoulder at the girl standing on the ramp.

“Go back up, Lillian. Chief Vauc is looking for you, and you don’t want to get stuck cleaning the maintenance crawlspace again.”

“But Rissy! We just got here!”

The Togruta rolled her eyes, “This trip barely took a few hours, Lillian, now go before the Chief really gets angry.”

“I believe I asked why you’re here, Captain....Rissy?” spoke the Human, his hands gripping a waistcoat and glaring at the woman.

“Rissa,” she growled, crossing her arms and staring at the man, who’s gaze seemed to dart to her shoulders and the muscles tightening as she moved. He swallowed nervously. “And I am not the Captain. I am his security officer. The Captain will be with you shortly.”

A thump from up the ramp drew the man’s eyes before he could ask questions, and he stepped back in alarm. A figure standing over seven feet in height, clad in armor that shined like the ship, shiny and chrome. On his back was a twin nozzle pack and a shield hanging from the rear of his belt, likely it would drag on the ground on someone of a smaller frame. Over his shoulder, he carried a hammer with glowed with a blue light, which he dropped the head of to the ground as he reached the bottom of the ramp.

“Hail and well met, good sir! I am Stres’tron’garmis, or, Strong! Captain of the *Ladies Delight*,” he bowed slightly, taking his helmet off and tucking it under one arm. Glowing red eyes caused many of the villagers to take a step back. **“I hail from a nearby system, where we picked up a distress call concerning Haven’s trouble with a beast! If you could direct me, I would have words with it.”**

“Distress call!?” sputtered the mayor, turning to glare at the crowd. “Who put out a distress call!? Haven has dealt with its own troubles for years; we need no assistance from some...some...*outsider!*” he shouted, turning to glare at Garmis, finding himself looking at a reflection of himself in the Chiss’s chest plate. “And especially not from some alien circus such as you and your ship of scantily clad harlots!”

Strong lifted an arm slightly to block Rissa as she began to advance on the man, a dangerous look on her face.

“I called them, mayor,” spoke a tired-looking man in farmer’s garb, stepping forward. His hair was gray, the lines on his face deep. “We need help. We can’t keep—”

“You!? I should have known, old Crod Harkon couldn’t just leave things be, of course,” hissed the mayor, rounding on the man. “I’ll confiscate your plot at this rate, Harkon. Then you can go

off to the wilds and fend for yourself while your children inherit *nothing* because of your transgressions against the town.”

Harkon stared at the man for a moment, “You ain’t paid much attention to the census lately, have ya? My wife passed back in winter. My daughter got herself married to Conk’s boy, then Conk’s boy went and got himself killed working in the forest. Beast got him, tore him to shreds. Then she got sent out there by the council, *your* council to ‘placate’ the Beast. Ain’t go no family left, mayor.”

The man sounded as tired as he looked, beaten down.

“But what about young Karri, hmm?” asked the mayor, a gleam in his eye as he stepped up to the farmer. “You want your beautiful granddaughter to grow up with nothing?”

The farmer’s face hardened.

“Why do you think I called an Outsider for help?” he snarled, emotion finally breaking through the stone wall of his face. Anger. Sadness. “You get so deep in your damn cups the other night that you forgot!? Karri was working the tavern and kept turning you down when you tried to get her to go with you!”

Harkon turned and gestured at the other villagers watching, “And you lot! You watched this sleemo grabbing at her, and when she finally had enough and slapped him sideways....none of ya did a blasted thing to help her. Not even when he sat there and threatened to send her off as the next Tribute to the damn monster. Just like her mother.”

He spat on the ground at the mayor’s feet and glared at the man, “So yeah, I put out a call for help. Got my life savings for him if he can kill the Beast. Doing what you shoulda done forty years back, dealing with the damn problem. How much better and bigger could Haven be if we weren’t sending off young folks to the damned monster every couple of years!”

“I will take this task,” rumbled the Chiss, stepping forward and placing a large, armored hand on Harkon’s shoulder. **“Simply direct me at this creature, and I shall put a stop to all of this. Before your grandchild can be...sent away,”** he growled, glaring down at the mayor who trembled with indignity.

“I...appreciate the sentiment,” managed the farmer, head hanging.

“Sithspit,” snapped Rissa, pushing past her Captain to grab the mayor by his lapels, lifting him off the ground. “You’ve been feeding people to this thing!?”

"Take your hands off me, subhuman filth!" he shouted, grasping her forearms and trying to free himself, feet kicking. "I do what I do for Haven! Every Tribute keeps the Beast at bay! Those who've died did so as *heroes!*"

"Unless it was some girl who didn't want to put out for a drunken old man," she hissed, feeling Strong lay a restraining hand on her shoulder. She tossed the mayor to the ground and growled, turning to look up at her boss. "Frakk that. Let's go."

He raised an eyebrow, "**You do not intend to guard the ship?**"

"Chief can do that fine, especially against this lot. Besides, Jindo knows how to use the laser cannon," she nodded towards a hatch on the underside of the vessel hiding the anti-pursuit laser cannon. "I've been drilling her over it."

The Chiss stared down at his head of security for a moment before sighing and nodding.

"What direction, good sir?" he asked Harkon, lifting his helmet and hammer.

The farmer pointed north into the woods.

"Jindo, need a sensor scan to the north of our position. Full lifeform sweep, we're looking for something...uhh..." Rissa paused, comlink raised to her lips.

"Big," stated the farmer, simply. "Big and hungry."

"Something big and hungry. Look for any oversized lifeforms that aren't the Captain."

"Got it, Rissa. Not fair though, you going off with the Captain all alone, Lil is gonna sulk."

"Just make sure she doesn't follow us, this is going to be dangerous. Out."

Thirty minutes the pair had tromped through the forest, picking their way around brush or Strong simply stomping it down for his companion to pass through. Of his crew, Rissa was certainly the most suited to such an expedition.

"I must ask, Miss Rissa," he began.

"Why I didn't change? Was too angry," she said with a sigh, slapping an insect trying to investigate her. "I'll try to be more focused in the future, boss."

He simply nodded, holding a hand out to help her over a log, which she ignored vaulting over it. He shook his head and chuckled inside his helmet, reminding himself that the Togruta needed little assistance from him in general. She was one of the few women he'd ever met that could stand toe to toe with him in a sparring match.

A roar echoed through the forest, causing the pair to pause.

"Captain! Sensors have picked up a life form in your area that fits the criteria of 'big', not sure about hungry."

"Yes, from the sound we just heard we are able to assume angry at the very least."

"About two hundred meters northwest of your position, good luck, Cap!"

It didn't take long to track the roars down to a cave in the side of a rocky mountain rising out of the forest. Or the creature causing it. Two muscled legs held up a body that looked mostly to be mouth and teeth.

"Is that a frakking rancor?"

"INDEED!" shouted Strong, sounding delighted as he hefted his hammer and keyed the modulator on his helmet to project his already loud voice further.

"BEAST! FACE ME! I SHALL SHOW YOU THE ANCIENT COMBAT RITUALS OF THE GARMIS BLOODLINE, PASSED DOWN FOR GENERATIONS!"

Rissa winced, "Was that really necess-oh here it comes!" she shouted, diving to the side as the beast came charging in.

Strong was laughing, swinging his hammer with feet set shoulder-width apart, braced and ready. The hammer hit the side of the rancor's face as it roared down, ready to snap the armored figure up. The repulsor-driven head slammed into the beast's jowls, forcing the nearly fourteen-foot tall monster sideways, shaking its head in confusion.

The Chiss spun his weapon to prepare another strike, only to let out a modulated 'OOOF' as one of the rancor's massive hands swung around and backhanded him into the forest with a crash. He sat for a moment, head spinning and body aching from the impact.

"Ow," he managed through grit teeth trying to stand up.

Meanwhile, Rissa was rolling away from another strike from the beast, its hand swiping and grabbing at her. It made noises of frustration, roaring into the sky before pursuing the blue Togruta.

“Come on boss,” she panted, jumping back out of reach. “Anytime now!”

In the woods Strong found himself stuck. To a tree. As his armor and rocket pack had crumpled around it from the impact. He struggled to move, wrenching his body against his own armor, before sighing.

“COULD REALLY USE SOME HELP BOSS!” shouted Rissa, jumping to the side as the rancor charged. “Why the hell didn’t I get gear from the ship,” she grumbled to herself, “going to pop that little mayor’s frakking head from his body when we get back.”

“**I am here!**” bellowed the Chiss, charging out of the trees, hammer lifted for an overhead strike. This drew a relieved sigh from his security officer until she got a good look at him. Aside from the hammer and a loincloth he was apparently lacking the rest of his equipment.

“Boss, where’d your armor go?” she shouted over the roar of annoyance from the rancor as Strong brought the hammer down onto one of its legs. There was an audible snapping sound, the monster going down to one knee, keening in pain.

“**It was damaged! But do not fret, we are still capable of defeating this beast even without it!**” he declared, hammer swinging again towards the rancor’s beady eyes. It didn’t land, the creature lashing out in pain and anger to send the Chiss sprawling once more, his hammer flying out of his hand.

The rancor turned its gaze towards the other blue one who’d been depriving it of a meal and tried to lunge, screeching in pain as it shifted its now very broken leg. She dodged out of the way, grabbing the lit up handle of her boss’s hammer and swinging it up and around into the rancor’s jaw, snapping its head back. It again shook its body in annoyance and confusion, bringing its jaws back around to roar at Rissa. She began to lift the hammer again, gritting her teeth as she felt her continued efforts to dodge the creature starting to weigh on her.

“**I am not done with you beast!**” she heard Strong shout as he ran right past her, loincloth flapping as he launched himself up into the air while the beast tried to snap at her. The big man landed on the rancor’s face, feet scrambling for purchase to keep from sliding down into the monster’s mouth, which was biting at the air while it swung its head around in an effort to bite at the creature covering its nose with its bulk.

It roared again as Strong reared backed, one hand clutching at the skin of the rancor, the other balled into a fist that he slammed into the creature’s right eye. It bellowed in anger as the Chiss continued to punch it, only slightly aware that his companion below was taking the opportunity to hammer the rancor in its good leg, until it screamed out in agony once more and pitched over. The Arconan tumbled from his perch as the rancor fell on its side, whimpering, both legs broken and shattered. Strong rolled to his feet, drawing deep breaths and gave Rissa a smile.

“Mightily struck!” he declared, hands on his knees as he caught his breath. So engrossed on the rancor, he did not notice the way she eyed up his sweat-slick form.

Lillian is going to be so jealous that she missed out on this, she thought, biting her lip as she approached. The crew was in constant competition to see which of the four women would finally break through their employer’s apparent denseness when it came to their attention. It was rare for her to have him alone, even if they sparred on the ship one of the others would be close at hand. She laid a hand on his shoulder, wondering how to best take advantage of the situation.

“Just following your stellar example, Captain,” she said, lightly squeezing at the muscles on his shoulder, hand trailing over his back. “We should probably finish it off though, and then....check out the cave?”

“You believe Master Harkon’s granddaughter may yet live?” he asked, looking up at her with that damned expression of interest in what was being spoken of, but not of her. The man was known to the crew now to be a bit of a playboy, yet he didn’t seem to have any interest in playing at home.

“Uh, yeah. That too. Was just thinking we should maybe rest a bit,” she said, her hand moving to his arm, giving the bicep a stronger touch, hoping he’d get the message. “Wouldn’t do to go back to Haven looking out of sorts, right?”

“I believe all Haven need know is that their beast trouble is over, we can accomplish that over comms. If we go back, Mister Harkon will feel obliged to pay us.”

“You....don’t want his money?”

“I do not need it,” replied the man with a shrug. **“I will see that you receive a bonus this month, though, for standing against such a tremendous foe, Miss Rissa! An exhilarating battle!”**

She mulled that over, at least she’d be getting some extra dosh out of this. She glanced down at his loincloth and debated throwing proprietary to the wind and getting direct about all this, when the sound of repulsors filled the air. Shielding their eyes, the pair looked up to see the *Ladies Delight* hovering above, the Nubian vessel dipping its nose down.

“If you could stand clear, Captain, we’ll put that thing down properly. Also Rissa. I mean if Rissa wants to get out of the way, we’ll ummm, blast it.”

Strong glanced at his companion, who on the sudden arrival of her fellows aboard the ship had jerked her hand away, and nodded towards the edge of the clearing.

“We should try to salvage my armor at least, Miss Rissa, before we rejoin the ship.”

“Right. Yes sir,” she replied, professionalism returning.

At least she could say she’d beaten a rancor into the ground. With some help. But still, this would get her some free drinks back on Selen.