

Faible smoothed the fabric on the front of his suit for the dozenth time. The Credit Overload Casino was in full swing, as it always was. Hundreds of guests were arriving into the foyer. They laughed and gawked at the massive entryway with its fountains, statues, interactive screens, and bustling serving droids. Young couples and idealistic youths were ushered into queues to check in at the kiosks, while those who had exhausted their last credits were quickly shuffled out through side exits.

Faible checked his chronometer again. *They're late*, he thought while keeping a forced smile upon his face. He immediately admonished himself, *they're VIPs. They can arrive whenever they want. I just wish they weren't three hours late.* His feet hurt from standing perfectly still for those three long hours. His employers would fire him immediately if he paced or rocked and he couldn't afford to pay off his gambling debts if he wasn't working.

Staring intently ahead he noticed several floating paparazzi droids start to gather together beyond the seven meter tall glass wall that made up the entryway. Someone was arriving that was making a scene. *Oh, I hope that's them finally!*

The doorway parted and six individuals strolled in. Their faces beamed as they laughed and chatted. The one in the lead waved formally at the droids as he gave them whatever sound bite would be making the morning's news cycle. Faible recognized him immediately. It was his grace, Duke Kamjin of Juanno, the former Moff of the planet. He looked slightly older than when Faible remembered seeing him on the holonet but still cut the same dashing figure. His crisp military uniform and flowing cloak gave off an air of dignity and style that Faible expected of VIPs attending The Credit Overload.

Looking past Kamjin, Faible's jaw nearly fell open at the sight of the...he might use the term 'rabble' to describe the five individuals following behind. Faible, expertly trained to analyze the needs of his guests, tried to take them all in. Three of the individuals appeared to fit with the glamorous styling of the Empire. Two were wearing Imperial uniforms, immaculately maintained. One of which wore his lightsaber openly; same as Kamjin. The third, while not in an Imperial uniform, looked to be wearing something tailored to fit in with the crowd. The vambraces he wore might be a problem with security. Faible loathed having to explain to VIPs that they couldn't open carry in the casino.

It was the remaining two individuals that stuck out like a Hutt in a crystal shop. A nearly two meter tall Duros wearing an atrocious floral printed short-sleeve button down shirt over khaki cargo pants. The wrap around sunglasses with red tinted lenses matched his red eyes. He had no idea what was in the multi-colored pack he wore around his waist but he was certain the Duros would cause trouble with it. The other was a, he assumed female, Sephi under the heavy black cloak and armor she wore. She would have appeared as tall as Kamjin if she wasn't hunching over. She looked thoroughly out of place in the limelight of the droids snapping pictures, judging by how she pulled her hood further over her head.

Faible swallowed hard as Kamjin approached him. "Your Grace, I'm honored to welcome you back to The Credit Overload. As you still maintain one of the executive suites in one of our spires I'll spare you the extensive tour." Turning to face the gathered group behind Kamjin he continued, "And to you, guests of our former Moff, welcome!" He dreaded this next part, "Sirs, you'll need to check your weapons."

Kamjin cut him off with a wave of his hand, "They're my guests. They can keep their items." Faible's mind went fuzzy. What was it he had been dreading? There was something he

had to tell them but it was fading into the recesses of his mind. "Ah yes," he recovered. "Our proprietor has arranged for the Executive Table to be made available for your Sabacc game this evening. I will tell the chef to finalize the entrees. In the interim, the whole of the casino is available to your party and I shall ensure all your desires are taken care of."

"Great, then let's start with a drink," the Duros chimed in.

Faible looked up at the smiling face and forced himself to mirror it. "Of course, sir. What would your pleasure be?"

"Durosian Ale."

"Better make that a round for everyone," Kamjin added. As Faible rushed away to fulfill the order, Kamjin turned to the Summit. "I'd like to thank you all for joining me here. I know we've often been at odds on certain events, as of late. I hope you know that, while I was a founding member of the House and Clan, I'm completely satisfied in my role as another Clansmen. I hope this evening will help clear the air between us and give you all a much needed respite from the toils of recent battles."

Faible had returned by this time with a server droid carrying a large tray of ales. As they were passed out, Kamjin took his and raised it in toast, "To the leaders of Clan Scholae Palatinae!"

Each of the Summit members raised their glass in turn and echoed, "For the Clan!" Xantros took a healthy glug of his ale. Dek, Sykes, and Mauro equally sampled it and found it to be palatable. Shadow sniffed it, took a sip, and then quietly slipped it back onto the droid's tray.

"Now then, I must apologize. It's been ages since I've been back to my place here and I'd like to retrieve something. Faible, please ensure my companions are well loosed after as they take in the casino. I shan't be long." Kamjin patted poor Faible on the back before turning with a flourish of his cloak to head off to one of the turbolifts.

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Faible led the remaining members of Kamjin's entourage onto the casino floor. Shadow felt both at home with all the shadows and uncomfortable as it stretched far off into the horizon. She couldn't even see where the room ended. The space was several stories high with an assortment of attractions spread throughout. It was as if mini-buildings had been constructed within the massive building, all with the expressed purposes of gambling. A mini-Massassi temple had been constructed with various slot machines on each tier. Several floating 'cloud cities' hovered above the room with individuals engaged in some zero-gravity billiard game.

Sykes laughed at the sight of a fake Hutt throne room with several table games and servers dressed in Rancor costumes. As Mauro gave him a puzzled look, he launched into sharing the recent struggles his apprentice had while trying to handle several rancors with Kamjin.

Xantros, who had insisted on getting a refill for his ale already, spoke to Dek in great approval of the zooming model starships throughout the arena that were being piloted by patrons in the hopes of winning the racers pot. Dek was impressed by some of the piloting skills he saw amongst the intoxicated patrons and further wondered just how intoxicated they would all become from the general haze of smoke in the room.

Faible raised his voice to be heard over the din of the room, "Kamjin has provided generously for your entertainment." He passed out flat disks that fit in the palm of their hands. "There's a hundred-thousand credits on each of these disks for you to use while you're here. Simply press them to the machine, your spot at a table, or to a server droid to utilize them." He turned and gestured to the massive hall, "If any game is busy please let me know immediately and I'll ensure that you have a seat."

That should please them. Hopefully they'll leave a good review when this is all done, he thought to himself. Turning back around his jaw dropped as he searched frantically. *Where did they go?* Shadow was completely gone from sight. After a while he spotted Mauro and Sykes talking it up with two Twi'lek dancing girls in the 'Hutt' arena. After racing through the rows of slot machines he finally found Dek and Xantros in a heated discussion with the pilots as they queued for the next race.

It's going to be a long night...

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Kamjin slipped off the turbolift on the next floor and doubled back out of the casino. Making use of some of the service passageways, he saw Xantros begin to chat up Faible and order another ale. He chuckled to himself at the sight of the poor host trying to keep up with Xantros.

Stepping out into the chill night air, he pulled a cloak he had grabbed on the way out over his head. The tang of seaspray from the nearby ocean salted the air. For a brief moment he inhaled and remembered happier times here; then he was off. Flaggering down a nearby rental speeder he slipped in quickly before anyone could notice him.

"I need to get to this spire," he said, keying in the specific destination in the datapad in the rear of the speeder.

"You've got it, boss," the Gran driver said.

Kamjin looked at the window as the casino cityscape blurred into streaking lines of light. This was a gamble; which fit nicely with the setting. He was honest in wanting to treat the Summit and put the past behind them. He wouldn't say it was regret, but he wished he hadn't needed to pull some of his trump cards recently to accomplish his tasks. He had come back to the Clan because he needed their resources and utilizing the Emperor's Hammer's resources came with too many strings attached.

The speeder started to climb higher in the traffic lanes, leveling off for the private landing pad. "Keep the meter running. I won't be long," Kamjin said as he stepped out of the speeder. The air was colder up here despite it being a warm spring day. He rushed into the building and froze. His old condo had been completely restored. He had expected it to have been repaired after the explosion, but hadn't expected all the furniture, hangings, and other decorative items to be restored. Whomever had invested the time should be commended.

Pulling back his hood he whistled a short tune. After a moment there was a whistled response. A short Rodian stepped out of the shadows.

"You're not who I was expecting." Kamjin said.

"Your contact said he couldn't leave without arousing suspicion. Especially not after what you did in Tokare,," The Rodian looked around nervously.

"Fine, then you have what I need?"

"Maybe, I was told I'd be paid." The Rodian shuffled his hands together while taking a half step back into the shadows.

"Of course," Kamjin smiled broadly. "As I'm sure my associate told you, I'm a man of my word."

The Rodian relaxed slightly and reached into his jacket. As he withdrew his hand there was a small data code cylinder. Kamjin stretched out his left hand and laying his palm open made it clear he expected the Rodian to hand it to him. The Rodian skittishly shuffled forward. As soon as he was within the barest distance of Kamjin's hand he dropped the cylinder into the open hand.

As Kamjin closed his left hand around the cylinder he raised his right. Reaching out, he pulled the Rodian forward. Clutching his neck in his hand, Kamjin raised the Rodian off the floor. "This is everything, right?"

"Yes, yes, of course! I'd never try to double cross you," the Rodian squealed. Kamjin probed the Rodian's mind and found that he was being truthful. As he pocketed the cylinder he squeezed his hand tighter. As the Rodian thrashed about, struggling to breathe, Kamjin's communicator chirped.

He withdrew it and calmly activated it, "This is Kamjin."

"Uhh...Yes, your Grace. There's...I don't quite know how to say it," the voice of Faible stuttered over the open line.

"Best to just say it then," Kamjin smoothly replied while resetting his grip on the Rodian.

"There's been a bit of a...disturbance with your guests. Would you be able to return to the casino?"

"I'll be there shortly," Kamjin closed the channel and replaced the communicator on his belt. He turned to face the Rodian, whose eyes were bulging as his hands clawed at Kamjin's. Kamjin gave a scowl at the man and then crushed his neck completely. Dropping the lifeless body to the floor he went over to order a servant droid to dispose of the body. One of the many perks on this planet was bodies disappeared quickly and quietly.

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Faible was at his wits end. Several pit bosses were surrounding him, each talking over the other, telling him of the havoc caused by Kamjin's guests.

"I don't know how but the Duros sliced the ships to be able to leave the track. They've been buzzing the patrons in the slot rows," one pit boss complained.

"The two in the Hutt palace have become so intoxicated one has started fighting with the employees in the rancor outfits. One of them was screaming 'give Ellac back his eye' as he rode his back, pummeling the rancor suit," the next bemoaned.

And so the stories continued one after another. *And I still haven't found that woman who came in with them. Who knows what chaos she is causing?* Faible was panicking. He had called Kamjin half an hour ago and he still wasn't back. If this went on much longer, he was going to be blamed and who knows where he'd end up. Just as he was about to lose his mind and scream, he saw Kamjin strolling towards him.

“Your Grace,” he started. “May deepest apologies for disturbing your business. Your room is ready and we’re having some...difficulties...in gathering your guests back together.” Kamjin laughed, “I’m sure you have. Let’s go gather everyone up.”

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“Foul rancors, none shall lay hands upon my apprentice without suffering my wrath!” Sykes barked from atop a pile of rancor-suited employees. In one hand he held the decapitated head of one of the suits. Tufts of white stuffing fell out of it as the exposed employee tried desperately to get out of the pile.

“Did you see that Mauro? I single-handedly bested these foul beasts!” Sykes howled as he jumped down. He grabbed a mug of some foaming beverage, downing what remained before chasing off after another employee in a rancor suit.

Mauro sat with his legs up on a table and a Twi'lek girl in his lap as he guffawed at the sight of Sykes racing off and the squeal of the worker trying to move quickly in the bulky suit.

Faible led Kamjin into the arena, carefully walking ahead to clear out patrons so Kamjin didn’t bump into the other guests. Kamjin tapped Mauro lightly on the shoulder, “Looks like you two are having a fun time.”

Mauro looked up grinning and gently patted the Twi'lek off his lap. “This is one heck of a place, Kam.” Kamjin took note it was the first time Mauro had referred to him informally.

“Oh yes, it’s got its charms. Come on, our table is ready.”

“Good luck getting Sykes under control,” Mauro gestured with his thumb as Sykes came back into view, hopping lightly from table to table before body slamming on top of the latest rancor employee.

Kamjin yelled out, “Sykes, we’ve got food and booze waiting for us at the table.”

Sykes, who had taken to biting the rancor head, shot up and spit out the foam rubber from his mouth, “I’m good to go!”

Faible rushed over to make apologies to the injured employees and to call over help.

“Keep up, Faible,” Kamjin called as he threw his arms around Mauro and Sykes. He laughed as Sykes launched into telling how he had ensured those rancors didn’t cause any problems.

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“Look, what I’m saying is, there are no rules against modifying the ships,” Xantros protested to an angry looking Devaronian. “The objective of this game is to beat the other racers. Your own sign,” he gestured to the large holoprojector, “says, no-holds-barred racing.”

“That’s marketing,” the Devaronian growled.

“No, that’s a publicly stated contract,” Dek refuted. “You can’t promise no-holds-barred and then impose these sorts of limitations.”

“Plus, we only barely touched anything,” Xantros chimed in. “All I had to do was shift this one wire over to this spot. That’s hardly the level of complex engineering you’re implying.”

“You cheated,” the Devaronian retorted.

“Cheated? **CHEATED?** I have never cheated in my life,” Xantros pointed to his chest in self defense.

“Well...there was...” Dek started.

“That doesn’t count.”

“And there was that one time on Malastare.”

“You were there, you know that was permissible based upon the Gran’s law of canoodling,” Xantros said rubbing his chin.

“You didn’t say that at the time.”

“Well I was busy running to meet up with you!”

“Focus!” The Devaronian yelled, clearly at his wits end with the two. “You were both cheating and your winnings are forfeit!”

Kamjin put a hand on the Devaronian, turning him gently around. Looking him deeply in the eyes he said, “They didn’t cheat”

“They...didn’t cheat.” the Devaronian’s eyes glazed over.

“Their winnings are valid.” Kamjin said.

“Their winnings are valid.”

“Great, now that that’s settled. Dek, Xantros, our table is ready. Let’s go.” Kamjin patted the still-dazed Devaronian on the back. Dek and Xantros gave each other a mischievous grin as they both patted the Devaronian on the shoulders as they walked by.

“Thanks for all the fun,” Dek said.

“Couldn’t have enjoyed it more if we tried,” Xantros chimed in.

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Faible had never felt more relief than he did when he got Kamjin, Sykes, Mauro, and Dek into the private room. A massive table was set up in the middle with a low-hanging light. Around the walls were massive trays of exotic foods and drinks for them to consume. A beautiful female Nautolan sat shuffling the sabacc cards. Kamjin had requested a live dealer versus one of the dealer droids.

As the men went about gathering food and drinks for the rest of the night’s activities Faible had a figurative heart attack. *The girl! Where is the girl! I had completely forgotten about her.* Sweat began to pour from his forehead. *This is it. They’re going to notice she’s gone and it’ll be all my fault. There’s no way out of it. I’ve got to say something and try to buffer the damage.*

Faible made his way over to Kamjin but was interrupted.

“Hi Shadow, how was your time in the casino?” Kamjin asked.

Faible searched frantically in the room. Shadow? Where?

Shadow gracefully stepped into the dim light cast off from the center illumination. “Hi Kamjin, it was enjoyable.” She had gotten more comfortable once she found the casino floor had less lighting than the entry foyer.

“Great! Well, since we’re all here, let’s sit down and get the game started.” Kamjin motioned everyone to their respective seats at the table.

“Welcome, gentle beings,” the Nautolan said in her sing-song voice. “Please place your credit chips at your slot for your funds to be assessed.”

Kamjin showed them where to insert the chip. As he inserted the chip a hologram image of 100,000 credits appeared. Xantros entered his and 250,050 appeared. Dek's displayed 220,000. Dek laughed and launched into an explanation of how Xantros had beat him in the last race.

Mauro's credit chip displayed 80,000 credits while Sykes' displayed 75,000. Faible whispered in Kamjin's ear that repair costs had been deducted from their credit chips to pay for repairs.

"Shadow, last but not least." Kamjin motioned to her slot.

Shadow grinned and inserted her chip. A gold hologram sprang forth indicating 1,500,350 credits. Everyone started clamouring at once to hear how she had won so many credits. Shadow pulled her hood up and grinned as she tapped the table for the dealer to deal.