

## **Bad Decisions**

### **Arx Space**

**40 ABY**

Winch knew he was playing a dangerous game. Not only was he transporting *The Impulse*, which was the *Regent of the Brotherhood's ship*, but Winch was piloting it himself.

Normally, that wouldn't be a cause for any concern. The mission was essentially as simple as flying from one location to another. Accelerate, brake, move forward, and turn. That's all. It was simple in principle. However, Winch was an incredibly intelligent man which came as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it made him vigilant in his duties. He understood that trouble could come around at any moment, especially those looking to take advantage of the man in charge of the Brotherhood's credit account. His memories of the Clone Wars had ingrained how low the galaxy could stoop when it came to money.

On the other hand, this ship was unlike any he had seen before. On the surface it was little more than a regular Fondor Haulcraft. It was pitch black on the outside, which let it blend into the blackness of space. It possessed more powerful engines that increased the ship's speed and maneuverability. Then there were the *countermeasures*, of all frakking things! If you wanted to grab Winch's attention, attaching a pair of laser beam projectors on each wing of the ship was the way to do it. The gears in his head practically exploded at the possibilities.

After all, he had constructed them himself, and it was damn fine engineering if he had to say so himself. Not that he would, he wasn't the type to gloat.

Winch wasn't representing Taldryan. Things were tense between the Taldryan Supreme Chancellor and the Regent after the former's brother had *apparently* made an ass of himself in another Clan's territory. Regardless of what Ellisyn might have said, Winch didn't entirely trust him. Darrio was a loose cannon, and if there was one thing Winch didn't like, it was the unpredictable. There were far too many variables that could go wrong, and Darrio was the living embodiment of the word *random*.

Arx Capital Exchange.

More specifically, Mattock Station. The station came into view, the sheer size of it reminding Winch to harden his resolve. Things would work out. The Regent was Mandalorian, after all. They were people of their word.

*"This is Mattock Station. Unidentified vessel, state your name and intention."*

"Winch. I'm delivering the Regdnt's new ship."

After a moment's silence, the crackling on the intercom came through. *"Proceed to hangar bay seven. The Regent is expecting you. He will personally deliver the vessel to the storage facility on Arx himself. "*

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## **Mattock Station**

### **40 ABY**

The ship landed, and the ramp lowered in the cold, metallic, and bitter greyness of the Mattock Station docking bay. The chill sent a shiver down Winch's spine, but he stood tall.

Sure enough, the Regent was there. The difference between him and Taldryan's Supreme Chancellor was staggering. Whereas Appius wore brazen armor, quite eccentric to a degree, the Regent's was bold and intimidating. Was he Zabracki? The horns atop his helmet seemed to suggest as such. Winch approved of the immaculate craftsmanship, even from a distance. Perhaps if things were amicable between them, he could discuss with Jim the finer points of moulding beskar?

"You're early," Zxyl said. "I assume there were no complications?"

"None at all," Winch answered, his voice gruff, though he kept his distance.

"And the upgrades?" Zxyl asked.

"Attached and installed. The droid brain from here on out will answer to you, and *only* you. The weapon systems have been upgraded to your specifications, and the engines have had their power increased."

Zxyl didn't answer Winch. Instead, he took a few steps to the side, seemingly inspecting Winch's handiwork on the ship. The Regent's arms remained folded, and Winch could only guess as to what he was thinking. With a single command, Winch could be taken hostage, it wasn't an easy thought to swallow.

"Does your little *group* have any hostilities with Taldryan?"

The question caught Winch by surprise. The Regent wasn't supposed to know about the Crusaders.

"How?" Winch asked.

"I keep a close eye on matters regarding my old home," Zxyl simply answered. A group of heavily armored troopers and Mandalorians doesn't go around unnoticed."

Damn it! Winch had warned Angel they were acting too much in the open.

"Well?" Zxyl prodded.

"No."

The Regent seemed to consider the answer for a moment. "Very well. It isn't lost on me that you aided Taldryan in recent troubles, which is why I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt. A deal is a deal. The credits will be transferred to your account."

Winch took that as his opportunity to leave, a million thoughts swirling through his head. This was a bad idea, no matter how well the mission paid. It was all a set up for that one question, and he needed to report back to the Crusaders before Angel ordered something stupid.

Assuming she hadn't already.