

No Easy Job

By Jack Freeman

Deezn Jarok, dossier: 16826

The hangar bay was buzzing with life. It was usually pretty quiet in the evenings with the loader droid clunking about or the occasional dock worker pulling a double shift, but tonight was special. The *Rodak-IV* had docked today after a year-long voyage from one end of the galaxy to the other and back, hauling precious cargo from system to system. This was their first night home and it was an easy bet the crew was looking to blow off some steam. The walls were reverberating with *thump, thump, thump* of electro music and the air was filled with the merry laughter of deckhands and workers celebrating their freedom. They lounged amongst the off-loaded cargo, using crates as seats and gambling tables. There was dancing and drinking, all the rowdy merrymaking one would expect from spacers on shore leave. Judging by the amount of credits being tossed around the gambling tables, it looked to Deezn Jarok like the crew had made a real killing out during their trip, none more than their captain. The massive Dowutin male named Grimblod lay sprawled across the ramp of the freighter with a Twi'lek and a Togruta straddling his thighs. And yet, despite the flowing credits, it looked like tensions were running high. From what Deezn could see from his vantage point, anything and everything seemed like a good reason for someone down there to throw a punch, stomp away or throw something. It wasn't all that surprising, considering they had spent the last year cooped up together on a ship.

It looked like a fuel canister ready to blow.

Deezn swiped one green, suction-cupped finger down across the screen of his datapad, scrolling through the shipping manifest line by line. He whistled when he saw how many credits they'd made selling their last shipment of Ipsium. He knew the gas was worth a pretty sum but he never imagined it could fetch such a hefty bounty. With that much moolah, this Grimblod character could buy himself a mansion on one of the core worlds and live fat for the rest of his existence, even without his little secret. Deezn flicked through a few more entries. The data couldn't have been more clear, and it was obvious the crew didn't have access to it or they would have lynched the captain by now. He was playing them. Not only was he skimming extra profit off the top by falsifying profit margins, they weren't getting a fair cut in the first place. A group of them erupted in

laughter underlining their own ignorance. *Ignorance truly is bliss*, Deezn thought. He frowned.

A sharp synthetic whistle pulled his attention away from the datapad to the sentry droid hovering nearby. The droid bumped him as it gave an impatient beep. Deezn swatted the droid away. It avoided him easily then bumped him again, emanating a string of angry beeps.

“D3-C0Y, you need to be patient,” explained Deezn.

The sentry droid gave off a taunting whirr in response.

“I know we have to hurry, but I need to know what we’re getting into.”

An inquisitive beep.

“Yeah, just about ready,” he skimmed over the last bit of the shipping manifest. “Let’s go.”

The scrawny Rodian unplugged the datapad from the hangar’s service terminal and stuffed it in his satchel. He slipped the strap over his shoulder, rearranged his vest, then jumped down from the catwalk, latching onto the ball-like droid. They drifted down to the main deck unseen and took cover behind a crate. His back thumped hard against the side of the box due to his momentum, causing it to screech against the durasteel floor. He shot a glance at the partying crew to make sure they hadn’t heard him but the music would’ve drowned out a wailing Bantha. He ran a hand through the rust-colored bristle on his head and puffed his cheeks. He blew the air out as he pushed away from the crate and, keeping low, he moved onto the next then the next one after. He kept moving crate to crate, a flash of black and blue and Rodian green, droid in tow until they finally reached the underbelly of the *Rodak-IV*.

“Um, let’s see,” he whispered. “Let me think.”

He pulled the datapad out of his satchel and brought up the ship’s schematics.

D3-C0Y let out a sarcastic whistle.

“You know I always come prepared.”

A beep of disapproval.

“Ok, ok. Maybe not *that* time. How long are you going to bring it up?” Deezn shook his head. With a flick of his finger, Deezn found what he was looking for. The ship’s wireframe appeared on the datapad and, after he ran a filter, he brought up the underside. It took him a moment to refresh his memory and pinpoint a point of entry. It was a maintenance hatch designed for astromechs. “D3C, I need you to keep a lookout. If you see any of these guys going inside, you let me know over the commlink.”

With a synthetic moan of disapproval the droid was off. Deezn watched it disappear around the *Rodak-IV* with a crooked smile on his face. D3-C0Y had the attitude of a spoiled brat but he wouldn’t trade him for all the credits in the galaxy. The droid had his back, no matter what he said.

With a sentry now in place, the Rodian snapped to action. He ducked low and slid under the ship then walked half-crouched to the hatch. It was precisely where the schematics showed. Deezn pulled his hydrospanner from his belt and got to work unscrewing the access panel. He pulled the module free, yanked the cables out and connected his datapad. With two flicks of his finger, he tapped into the system and a second later the hatch swished open.

He brought his wrist link to his mouth and said, “I’m in.”

D3-C0Y responded through the commlink, inquiring if he desired a medal.

The Rodian chuckled as he pulled his scrawny frame through the opening into the ship. He climbed up inside a cramped maintenance shaft about half as tall as he was and only slightly wider. It really was made for astromechs, though he reckoned an Ugnaught would have fit in nice and snug. There was no way some big guy like Grimblod could never fit in there. Even Deezn, who wasn’t all that big for a Rodian, had to crawl on all fours to get to the other end.

The *Rodak-IV* was a large freighter and it took him a moment to reach the first fork in the tunnel. He ran the schematic again in his head. From his current location, he didn’t have to go all that far in any direction to find a terminal that had access to the ship’s mainframe. The nearest one was to the right, through the engine room. *Too easy*, he thought. A few more steps on his hands and knees and reached an exit hatch. There was

no need to slice into the terminal inside the ship. A simple rap of his knuckles on the access panel opened the hatch. The hiss of cooling engines filled his ears as he stepped into the engine room. It was bathed in red light and there was a mist in the air that made it hard to distinguish any distinct shapes beyond a half a dozen strides or so. The place reeked of coolant liquid as if there'd been a spill. He started walking in the direction of the terminal. He nearly jumped out of his boots when a clattering of metal came from ahead. He ducked behind cover between two pipes.

"Yovi, is that you?" called out a raspy voice.

Pfassk, thought Deezn. He was convinced that the entire crew would have been on shore leave. It sounded like some poor sods had drawn the short straw and got stuck behind doing repairs. A second voice, much closer this time, nearly caused him to scream. He clamped a hand over his mouth. This voice was shrill and vicious, "I'm here, Red. I thought that was you? Was that the maintenance hatch over there?"

"No idea, I'm still working on the cooling coil. It's busted good."

"I'll check it out," said the one called Yovi.

Deezn clamped his hands together to keep them from shaking. He could count himself lucky. Had they not said a thing, he would have surely walked right into the nearest one. Doubly lucky if he counted the fact that this Yovi was a big, muscle-bound Trandoshan with a real mean look about him. Deezn curled his funnel-like mouth and held his breath, willing himself to get smaller as the reptilian beastman thumped past his hiding spot towards the hatch. The Rodian swallowed hard. There was no going back now, and if he stayed put he would get spotted the moment this Yovi turned back towards him. Deezn slipped around the pipes and pushed further into the room on tiptoes, slinking from nook to cranny, careful not to make a sound. That was easier said than done, what with the metal walkway creaking beneath his feet.

"Looks like it malfunctioned again," announced the Trandoshan.

"Didn't you repair that thing a week back?" The first voice belonged to a Weequay; Red, the Trandoshan had called him. He was lying on his back, head and shoulders out of sight under a massive cooling coil the size of his entire body. Coolant

steam was rising from underneath, likely due to a crack if Deezn were the betting kind. The Weequay's voice seeped with loathing. "You can't get anything right, can you, Yovi? Pheh, no matter, leave it. I'll run a diagnosis later. Get back here, I need a hand."

If the Rodian remembered correctly, the terminal he was looking for was at the end of the corridor and around the bend. He would be able to keep out of sight while he worked, but he had to get there first and the Weequay was lying square in his path. Going back and taking the long way around would put him on a collision course with the other, much fiercer, crewman. The sound of the Trandoshan's boots clanking against the metal walkway, moving towards them, forced Deezn into action. He left his hiding spot and edged towards the Weequay foot over foot until he was standing over him. The steam escaping from the coil was cold. He bit down on his lower lip as he put one foot over the mechanic, oh so carefully, repeating *don't look up, don't look up, don't look up* in his mind.

He froze when the Weequay said, "Here, pass me the arc welder will ya?"

Biting down on his lip harder was all he could do to keep himself from whimpering. He squinted, searching for the arc welder through the steam. He found it on the ground nearby, grabbed it and shoved it at the Weequay's outstretched hand. Red grabbed it without a word and pulled it under the coil. The snap-hiss of the arc welder filled his ears. Deezn scampered away on wobbly legs, his stomach doing somersaults. There was a good reason he never ate before doing a gig. Deezn reached the bend and slid around it just in time for the Trandoshan to come stomping into sight near Red. The Rodian sat there for a moment, back against a wall panel, doing his best to level his breathing. He peeked around the bend at the two mechanics.

"What do you need?" hissed the Trandoshan.

"I'm good, beat it," snapped Red.

"Stop wasting my time," yelled Yovi. He stomped down on his lying companion.

The Weequay squealed as the air was ripped from his lungs. He pushed out from under the coil, smacking the Trandoshan in the legs with the butt of the arc welder. "What's your problem, boy?"

The Trandoshan snarled as he yanked the mechanic up by the collar and slammed him back first against the defective coil.. “I’ve about had enough of you.”

“Oh yeah? I’m just getting started,” the arc welder in the Weequay’s hands sparked to life, the blue flame jumping to the Trandoshan and burning into his jumpsuit. The reptilian shrieked and threw the Weequay down the corridor. He leapt onto him but Red managed to kick him off. That only bought him a moment before he was backhanded and with that, the two were off snarling and kicking and punching at one another.

Deezn wasn’t the smartest of folks, never claimed to be, but he had enough brains to know when it was time to get to work. He moved to the terminal, confident the ruckus would drown out any noise he made, and dropped to his knees hydrospanner in hand. He quickly popped the cover off the console and tossed it aside. He then fished his datapad out of the satchel and hooked up. Hollow pangs and thuds and distant screams told him the two were going at it something fierce. The Rodian’s datapad didn’t have the fastest processing power so it took him a moment to patch into the ship’s mainframe. When the interface finally came up on the datapad, he launched a decryption app and watched as, one by one, the crew’s access codes unfurled across the screen. By the time the software was done unpacking the data, something felt off. He scratched the back of his neck, unable to put his finger on it. He froze. The room had gone quiet. There was nothing but the hum of machinery. He set the datapad atop the terminal and moved to peek around the corner. He could see no one. The only movement was the steam rising from under the damaged coil, lit from under by a work light. He watched for a moment but he had the growing sensation that he needed to finish fast and get out of there.

He returned to the datapad and launched a search for the captain’s files. The algorithm wasted no time filtering the data and with a one final flick of his finger, Deezn had full access not only to Grimblod’s personal dossier, but to his logs and, most importantly, his bank account. That’s what Deezn was after. With direct access through the captain’s own login, there was no need to crack security. He immediately got to transferring the credits onto a tertiary bank account, one that would cease to exist within

a few days. He'd been doing this for a while now and it was a cinch to cover his digital tracks. He'd spend the next few days from the comfort of his home moving the money from one account to the next, wiping any traces in the process. It would take a better slicer than there was readily available on Chyron to counter his moves. By the time they did find such a person, he would be a ghost. That was if this Grimblod fellow even realized the credits were gone in the first place. Deezn never took much. He scooped a little excess fat off the top, as he liked to call it. That way, the credits were rarely missed and it ensured he wouldn't end up with a target on his back. The trouble started when you got greedy.

Or so he thought.

A series of high-pitched chirps came through his wrist link, causing him to jump and drop the datapad. D3-C0Y was warning him that Grimblod was going inside.

"Blast it," Deezn groaned. He was just about done, just a few seconds longer the transfer was complete. He yanked the plug and moved for the exit, stuffing the datapad into the satchel as he walked. He slammed head first into trouble.

"I knew I'd fixed that hatch," snarled the Trandoshan as he burst around the corner like a pouncing Wampa, eyes wide, yellow and filled with ideas of violence; the eyes of a predator. Before he could react, a massive clawed hand clamped down on Deezn's neck, squeezing out a meager yelp as it ripped him clean off his feet.

He kicked at his attacker but it was like kicking at a wall, painful and useless. The hand was crushing his windpipe. He couldn't speak. All he could do was gasp for air.

"Better take him to the boss." The Rodian had barely registered the Weequay limping up behind the reptilian crewman. Red looked like he'd taken quite the beating.

I am so dead, thought Deezn.

"I'll crush his head. Why bother Grimblod? We can just toss him out the hatch."

"Because he's the boss," Red insisted.

The hand around Deezn's neck loosened and he clattered to the floor on hands and knees, gasping and sucking at the air. He just needed to get to the hatch. The Trandoshan was too big to fit in there and there was no way the Weequay could catch

up, limping as he was. Before he could make a break for it, a boot cracked him in the side and sent him back first into the wall. A wave of nausea washed over him, flecks of black dancing in his vision. Any hopes of escaping were quickly fading. The massive form that appeared at the end of the corridor, blotting out the red light of the engine room, made sure to put those notions to rest. Captain Grimblod might as well have been a blast door.

"What's all the commotion, boys?" asked Grimblod. His voice, deep and rumbling, rattled Deezn's bones and drew a whimper from his lips.

"We've got ourselves a little Mynock, boss," answered the Weequay.

"A Mynock, you say?" The captain stepped closer, stroking the tusks on his chin with a hand larger than Deezn's torso. The stench of alcohol wafted from him like fumes from a cracked fuel pod.

"We caught him messing around with a terminal back here, ripped out some wires," hissed the Trandoshan.

"Can you put it back together?" asked Grimblod. His eyes never left the captive.

"Uh, yeah, easy. Ain't much damage. Popped cover, a couple loose wires. We caught him just in time," answered Red.

"Then get to it." Grimblod turned to Deezn and motioned for him to step forward, "Come here, boy."

The Rodian struggled to his feet. Wheezing and massaging his ribs, he stepped past the two mechanics, who both hip-checked him. He bounced from one to the other like a Nuna ball then fell past them, landing on his knees before an amused captain. His laugh was like distant thunder.

"See, boys? Someone knows his place. Get up," Grimblod growled and Deezn jumped to attention. He felt like a pebble beside a mountain, standing next to him. How long before he was crushed? "So, tell me. What are you doing messing with *my* ship?"

"Uh, I, uh," Deezn couldn't line up two words. All he could think was, *how am I going to get out of this?*

"Ripping off parts to pawn them off at the market, heh? Or a spy, perhaps?" Grimblod yanked the satchel from Deezn and pulled the datapad from it with two fingers.

He looked it over with a frown then stuffed it back into the satchel, eyes narrowed. He asked, “Did Saed send you?”

“Saed? Wh—who’s that?” Deezn croaked. He had to figure out how to get away, and he had an inkling of an idea forming at the back of his mind.

“Don’t play coy with me, boy, I’ll squash you like a bug.” The Duwotin’s face was turning red, his voice a threat, “Last chance. What were you doing on my ship?”

“I, uh, here, can I show you?” He pointed at the satchel still hanging from the captain’s grip.

Grimblod looked him up and down then frowned at the bag in his grip. He seemed to consider the request for a moment. Deezn figured the Captain wouldn’t see him as a threat. He was counting on it. The Duwotin shrugged and tossed the satchel to him. He caught it, then set to rifling through the rest of his belongings until his hand found a spheric device. He cupped it, rolled it in his palm, until he felt the outline of a button. Then, with a press of his thumb, he engaged the stun grenade. A loud, drawn-out beep cut through the hum of the engine room.

I always come prepared.

“What was that?” Grimblod, eyes wide, teeth bared, reached for the Rodian.

“Catch,” Deezn squealed as he tossed the grenade at the Duwotin and dove between his legs. Half-crawling, half-running, he plunged down the corridor. There was a detonation and the wild, lashing buzz of electricity, followed by a ground-shaking thud. He looked back to the downed captain only to find the Trandoshan climbing over his fallen boss, snarling and screeching like a rabid beast. Deezn threw the strap of the satchel over his shoulder and ran at breakneck speed, barreling past the broken tension coil. He took the bend towards the hatch too fast and slammed into the wall, stumbling to his hands and knees. He pushed towards the exit on all fours. The Trandoshan was gaining on him but he vaulted over the last pipes. He reached the hatch. No luck. His only warning was a snarl. The beastman threw himself snarling and clawing at him. All Deezn could do was duck under. The assailant flew past him and smashed his head against the maintenance shaft’s access panel. The hatch swished open.

"I'll eat your guts for dinner," the Trandoshan shrieked as he thrashed about in the confined space, claws slashing through the air. Deezn dove past him through the hatch. He scampered on all fours, the snarling beast hard on his tail. Yovi's claws caught on his vest. Screaming, Deezn pulled and pulled even as he was dragged backwards. There was a sound of fabric ripped and he was suddenly released. His assailant was too big for the service tunnel and it wasn't long before he was out of his reach. Deezn could almost taste freedom; that and the sweet, sweet taste of Jorgan Juice. He reckoned he deserved one if he got out of there alive. That taste turned sour the moment he dropped down through the maintenance hatch and crawled out from under the ship where he found himself staring down the barrel of a good dozen blasters.

He threw his hands up. "I give up."

"Boss, we got the intruder," said one of them into a commlink. There was no answer. "Boss? Come in, boss."

After a moment of silence, the crew were fidgeting, their blasters wavering as they waited for an answer. They shot one another confused glances.

Deezn shifted from one foot to the next, keeping his hands up. He had a thought. "So, uh, you guys know that your boss's been skimming profits, right?"

The one with the commlink shoved the barrel of his blaster square in the middle of Deezn's face. "What are you talking about?"

"Uh, let me show you." The Rodian backed away from the blaster and reached into his satchel slowly. Terribly aware of the blasters pointed in his direction, he retrieved the datapad. He brought up the shipping manifest and the fees paid, then showed it to the fellow with the commlink. "Do any of you know what Ipsium is worth these days?"

"Uh, you tell me."

"See here? Your boss cut a deal for two thousand a cell. Can you do math?" Judging by the look of shock on the grunt's face, Deezn knew he did. "Yeah, uh, I'm guessing you can."

At that moment, Grimblod lumbered out of the ship and down the ramp, nursing his head with one hand. He groaned as he nearly lost his footing. The Weequay came

limping after him, followed closely by the Trandoshan, eyes still wide with murderous intent. Deezn tried to hide behind the crew, but the trio froze when they realized the crew's attention was on them, or, more specifically, they were staring daggers at the captain.

"What's going on?" asked Yovi.

"Turns out ol' Grim here's been cheating us," answered the commlink guy.

"He what? What are you talking about?" asked the Weequay.

"Do you know how much Ipsium is worth?"

Deezn would have loved to see what happened next, but it looked like they'd forgotten about him. That was as good a cue as any to make an exit. Fingering his satchel, he backed away slowly, keeping the crew in sight as he slipped behind a crate. From the looks of it, Grimblod was in for a rough ride. He raised the wrist link to his lips and said, "We're good to go, D3C, see you back home."

Deezn smacked his lips as he crept out of the hangar bay. He could already taste that Jorgan Juice.

The End