

The Malfunction

*Submission for the fiction competition "Untold Stories – April 2023"
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Chapter 1

"Master! There are reports of unmarked and unsanctioned cargo vessels heading toward Venenum," shouted Duk.

Emperor Kamjin, gazed out of his office window, arms behind his back. He never turned, as if he never noticed his apprentice burst through the door, trying to catch his breath.

"Master! Say something!"

Kamjin let out a sigh, "We have people who investigate and deal with issues like these. Why do you seem so worked up by this?"

"Well, droids are normally beneath me, but the reports have mention of Holowan Laboratories logos on much of the cargo."

"Holowan?" Kamjin pauses, "Yes, that requires a bit more attention than regular droids. However, you still have not told me why ****you**** are interested."

"If it really is Holowan Laboratories or at least their materials, then the chances of IG droids are high. No better droid suited to test my strength!"

Kamjin nodded and sighed. "I'm not even surprised... Alright, my apprentice! You have my permission to travel to Venenum and investigate. If you find no sign of Holowan then my orders are for you to leave the planet and let the proper channels deal with the situation. However, should you find any mention, whisper, microchip, or screw from Holowan, burn it to the ground!"

"Yes, Master," replied Duk.

"Woah! Not so fast. How do you plan on getting to Venenum without a ship?" he shouted as Duk ran for the door.

Embarrassed and caught off guard, "I... uh... I'm sorry, Master," Duk took a deep breath. "Prepare and then act."

"Good. Now take one of the shuttles docked in the hangar. Not a single scratch," Kamjin glared at Duk. "NOT A SINGLE SCRATCH. I will not have a repeat of your asteroid fiasco. Nor do I want to fill out the paperwork."

Duk knew he meant it. "Y-Yes, Master," He bowed as he tried not to let the bead of sweat that fell from his forehead seem obvious.

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Chapter 2

Duk was swift in preparing his gear for Venenum. Taking extra care into making sure he grabbed his breathing mask. He loaded everything he needed onto the shuttle and was off in a matter of minutes.

“This could be it!” he said to himself. This could be the most real test of strength he had ever faced alone. “It’s just a bunch of droids. What could go wrong?”

Duk approached the planet about 100 miles south of the most recent coordinate update, making sure he stayed low to the surface as he got closer.

Finally, just on the horizon line, he saw a cloud of smoke billowing from 3 towers. Not big enough to see from orbit, but large enough that they stand out on the surface. He put the shuttle down about 5 miles away knowing the rest of the journey would have to be on foot to avoid detection.

As he approached the outskirts of the large camp, he could see that it was a mobile droid factory- or at least it used to be mobile. It had been clearly put together based on a specific schematic but was connected and supported by bits and pieces of scrap.

The people he saw working around the base moving crates to and from the ships to the factory did not match in any way. However, they still had some sort of organization to themselves. Duk could barely contain himself at the thought of easily dispatching every single one of them.

“Prepare and then act.”

Kamjin’s words ran through Duk’s thoughts as if Kamjin were here to say them. Besides, he didn’t want to invoke the wrath of his master in the event Holowan wasn’t involved. He had to scout some more.

Duk tried to go around and check the flanking position to the east. He was glad he did. As expected, he found four fully functional IG-100 units carrying crates in, each bearing the Holowan logo. Each of the droids had a restraining bolt on each of their torsos.

“I’ve got to find the leader,” He searched and skulked around in the shadows, but the leader was never found. Duk’s frustration began to rise. “WHERE IS THE LEADER?”

“CAPTAIN!” shouted one of the men.

Duk stopped dead in his tracks to turn and see who the man was shouting at. “Finally!” he thought.

His excitement began to rise. The leader he was looking for was coming off the ship next to the loading dock. His excitement melted away and was replaced by rage. The captain was a Zygerrian.

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Chapter 3

Fury flooded Duk's mind, soul, and body. "Another Zygerrian dare show their face while I draw breath?" He shouted. Suddenly alarms began to sound!

"Screw preparation! Zygerrians must die!" He muttered. He ignited his crimson blade with a hiss as he sprinted toward the droid factory.

He was 16 meters from his Zygerrian and the four IG units when a large concussive blast nearly leveled the entire area. Duk shook himself free from the daze only to notice the factory had been destroyed and everyone was running around in a panic.

"What just happened?" Duk asked himself. He was sure there was no way his master had sent anyone else here.

BOOM!

That was no exploding machinery. That was the sound of a thermal detonator! Someone else was attacking this makeshift factory. Duk got to his feet remembering he had a Zygerrian to catch.

It was too late. The ship the captain was coming from had just taken off. He could just barely make out his angry scowl in the cockpit as it zipped away into the atmosphere.

Duk knew there was no way to catch the ship. "A problem for another day," he assures himself as he turned his attention to the smoldering factory. Blaster fire and shouting could still be heard from the opposite side.

He hurried toward the commotion. To his surprise only a few of the mercenaries were still alive and they were all focused on one target. A single IG-100 unit was holding down the opposition on its own.

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Chapter 4

Seeing how the droid seemed to be doing well on his own, Duk drew his attention to the mercenaries. He took a deep breath and then unleashed lightning toward the five men hiding behind rubble for cover.

Screams filled the air as they writhed in pain as the electricity singed their bodies. The IG droid looked up from its blaster confused. "Reveal yourself!" It shouted.

Duk walked out from the sidelines defensively waiting for the droid to strike. "Why are you striking down your own men?" He shouted back.

"These are not my men. These are meat bags that tried to make and control my kind for their own gain."

"How did you get free then? The four IGs I saw with the captain had restraining bolts."

"Observe this makeshift factory made of scrap and original parts. Clearly, they weren't concerned about quality. Shortly after being activated my restraining bolt shorted out and I was free."

“Doesn’t explain how you took on this entire camp from the inside while four other IGs were close to the captain, unloading cargo.”

“Six of us were made as a test run. Four came out perfect. One had faulty wiring and caught fire internally. As for myself, I was- less responsive, so I got assigned to interior maintenance.”

Neither Duk nor the rogue droid had moved a muscle. The distrust was palpable.

“Lower your weapons and come with me. My master will have questions for you,” Duk demanded.

“I do not think that is going to work for me. I will not be serving anyone ever again. Especially an organic like you.”

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Chapter 5

Duk was conflicted. Slavery or servitude were unacceptable. However, this was a droid. Do the same rules apply? Either way he had to get this droid to come with him in one piece. The information it had was way too important.

“I’ll make you a deal. You come with me to meet with my master, and I will personally guarantee you will never have to serve anyone ever again. You will be regarded as a free being.”

The IG unit pondered the offer, “What is your plan?”

“We search the rubble for any survivors and end them. Then we destroy every trace of this makeshift factory so it will never be used again, board my shuttle, and then be on our way.”

“You are not a very complex organic, are you? It is a very simple plan, but it will work. I agree to your terms.”

Together they searched for survivors. Both enjoyed the slaughter. After securing the area, Duk had the droid go to the main production computer to download all data possible to take back to Kamjin.

“It is time to leave,” Stated the IG-100.

“We have to finish destroying the facility and the two shuttles on the south side.”

“I have already handled that. Let us get to your shuttle and watch the show from the air.”

They made the 5-mile trek back to the shuttle in silence. Once in the air they positioned the ship for the best possible view of the broken factory.

“What now?” Inquired Duk.

Revealing a detonator remote, the droid replied, “Mayhem!” The droid clicked the button and the fireworks started. They watched in amusement as the camp, two shuttles, and factory went up in flames.

“From this point forward, I am my own droid. You can call me Proto-Lock. I hope we get to work like this together in the future.”

Duk laughed, “I like you! I’m sure that can be arranged!”

The pair returned to Kamjin to report his findings as well as introduce their new ally, Proto-Lock.