

Episode IV:
Showdown on Clak'Dor VII

1

“It will be some easy creds, and Clak’Dor VII is only a few hours away; that’s all I’m saying,” I said for what seemed like the millionth time. Across from me in the cramped cockpit of the Ghtroc freighter, my furry feline companion, Baal, shook his head.

“We need to get back to Garnib, I still have my studies, and I need to figure out what just happened back there...on Kadon,” he said while fidgeting with the temperature gauge of the cargo hold. The total nothingness of space allowed us these precious moments to banter back and forth. I had just finished shaving two days growth from my face when he had called me into the cockpit. Initially he had just wanted my opinion on the Empire and it’s vast resources; I of course, had used it as an opportunity to return to a fresh discussion that had cropped up a day before when we had stopped to resupply the ship.

“Ya know,” I continued, leaning back and bracing my boots against the console, “it’s not just about credits, I mean, these Bith...they are a peaceful race...it would be a shame if someone didn’t step in and...you know, stand up for them.” Baal pulled his attention away from deep space and let his green eyes linger on me. “That’s not fair Vic, it’s not the same as it is with my people, with the CSA...” I didn’t let him finish and instead swung around in my seat, leaning forward.

“Wrong Baal...it’s EXACTLY the same...it’s oppression pure and simple. It’s oppression from living the kind of life you have worked hard for. Oppression from being safe and happy and able to do the things you deserve. It doesn’t matter if it’s the CSA or the Empire or, in this case, a bunch of cut-throat swoop scum...there are people being oppressed, and we are in a position to help them.”

The monstrously large gray and black feline leaned back and stroked a small tuft of fur under his chin. “So, you’re not interested in the credits, huh Outlaw? This is all out of the goodness and charity of your heart?” A tiny pang of guilt hit me right under the breastbone but I pushed it aside. “Hey pal, you don’t want to do this, that’s fine...we can run back to Garnib...I’m sure there are plenty of other mercs in the area who can help these people out...maybe if the Bith are lucky, those same mercs wont turn on them after the job is done and stick them for more than they are able to pay...” I watched Baal sit and rub his chin for a few more minutes out of the corner of my eye until he turned back to the console. “You had better get some sleep,” he said, “Clak’Dor VII is only a few hours away.”

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2

Clak'Dor VII hung in the black of space like a huge rust colored sphere. Almost like a God’s plaything that was no longer needed, discarded on a deserted playground. Through the tinted visor of my helmet the planet was as menacing and destitute as anything I had imagined. “Are

you sure your contact was reliable?" Baal asked as he piloted the Ghtroc towards the planet. We had yet to be hailed by any star port, nor did we see any sort of patrol craft in the area.

"Taffy is as reliable as every other piece of Nar Shadda trash," I replied, double-checking the charge on my light repeating blaster. "But this time I don't doubt him...the Bith that contacted him about us seemed legit. Plus, only a lunatic would touch down on this planet looking to mix it up with a gang of swoopers." _Baal snorted. "Yeah, or two lunatics. Oh, and what is the story with your armor anyway? You told me you would tell me after we left Kadon."

I unconsciously pulled at the Weequay topknot that sprung from my helmet. "It's patterned after a old bounty hunter's named Terminus the Hunter...some folk tale I heard back when I was running the streets of Lazhan with the Ivory Brigade. Supposed to be some sort of Weequay badass..." _The turtle-shaped ship dipped wildly and I nearly lost my footing. "What the hell?" I began when I saw Baal shaking off the effects of some sort of mental attack. He looked at me with regret and sadness in his eyes. _"They have struck another town," he said, bundling his purple robe around him. His unique ability was beginning to unnerve me a little. I had only seen one other person with such a connection to this "force..." _The silence was broken a second later by a hailing beacon...we were moments from setting down on hell.

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3

___ We sat amid mercs, bounty hunters and soldiers of fortune in an unbearably hot conference room. The landing had gone off without a hitch...unfortunately, due to the "unpredictable" nature of the planets visitors, they were directing ships to a makeshift-landing pad outside one of their 3 domed cities.

The planet was as unforgiving as it first appeared. A slightly toxic atmosphere hung in the air, making prolonged exposure a no-no. Baal had donned a breath mask that awkwardly covered his snout, while my Terminus armor filtered out most of the acrid stench and pollutants. _We were met by a Bith representative and showed to the town hall, inside of the domed city of Nez'both'ul. The Bith were a unique species, possessing enormous pink heads that looks as if their brains are about to burst and huge black orbs for eyes. They don't really have a mouth, per se, but instead have a few folds of skin. I'll give them credit though...they can play one mean kloo horn.

I wasn't surprised that they had been having security issues. Their domed cities appeared relatively prosperous, yet poorly guarded. Only two sentry's stood guard over the sliding transparasteel door, and the huge lumbering thing seemed to take forever to close. Add to that the incredibly loud air exchange system located right next to the entrance that kept the domes interior atmosphere breathable and you have a situation where any trouble occurring near the entrance may possibly go completely unnoticed. _Once inside, it was obvious these were a peaceful people. Baal's lightsaber was on his person and I had my LRB slung, and, to my knowledge, we were the only armed sentients in a square mile. Bith children played in an aquatic park and scholars were quietly preaching to small gathered groups of spectators. Had I been on vacation, I might have stopped to listen...but we were here for a reason...a very real and very dangerous reason.

The room perked up as two robed Bith strode into the room. The Tall one was adorned in an elegant jade robe, while his shorter counterpart wore plain black.

“Greeting beings,” he addressed the room. “I am Feyan Ce’daa, Chief Administrator of Nez’both’ul, and appointed speaker for the other Bith settlements here on Clak’dor VII.” His gaze fell across the room and the dozen beings gathered here. I looked over at Baal but he was watching the other attendees..sizing them up if need be. I wasn’t too worried...between his amped –up glow rod and my LRB, there didn’t appear to be too much to worry about from this crowd. “We have been repeatedly attacked,” Feyan continued, “...viciously, by these swoop gangs, up to three gangs of them at a time. They come into our towns, steal what they want and leave a trail of death ...death and carnage behind them.” The discussion was clearly agitating the Bith and I pulled my attention from Baal to Feyan.

“So why don’t you Bith do something about it?” a voice came from the back of the room. It belonged to a thick, slump shouldered twi’lek in ill-fitting armor. “Why hire us? You guys scared? Too scared to pick up a weapon?”

Feyan leveled his gaze at the heckler. “We are a peaceful race, Mr.Zang’tarr, and as such, we prize peace above all else.”

“Right... which is why you want us to fight your battles for ya,” Zang’tarr snorted. He nudged the Arconan sitting to his right and continued, “So what is the price tag..whats the pay buddy? You don't expect us to pull charity duty do ya?”

Taking a datapad from the other Bith, Feyan inspected it and handed it back. “Fifteen thousand per swoop gang eliminated, another Ten thousand if all are eliminated.” The mood in the room suddenly shifted. With the potential to make upwards of 55,000 creds, this all of a sudden became a serious negotiation. “So what info do you have on them?” a Pacithhip asked from the front. The room quieted and everyone turned their attention from the tusked alien to Feyan.

“Well, reports indicate they are working for a pirate by the name of...” he took the datapad again, “Jauxxon...”

His gaze had just returned to the group in time to see over half of the hardened help-for-hire finish shaking their heads and rising to leave. Baal and I were standing near the back and murmurs of “suicide” and “not worth it” reached us as the others left the room. Feyan was rightfully shaken up. “What? What did I say? Wait! Don't go!” he pleaded.

Zang’tarr was almost out the door when he turned back. “Forget it chrome dome...Jauxxon is a monster...and if these swoopers are operating under his orders, ain’t NO amount of money gonna be enough.”

“You ever heard of this Jauxxon?” I asked Baal. He shook his head as Zang’tarr walked out the door. “No, but then again I’m not an expert on underworld types.” We moved closer to the front and took seats near the Pacithhip. Feyan was visibly upset at the mass exodus of his audience, but regrouped and addressed the remainder: me, Baal, the Pacithhip and a pair of hunters, one of which was a Rodian.

“Please, we desperately need your help. Our cities cannot withstand these attacks...we have already had many deaths..” “Fooku do padoo eh?” The Rodian spat. His human counterpart, a scraggly man who seemed to have no interest in hygiene, translated: “One hundred thousand for the

Gangs, an extra twenty-five if we take care of them all!”

The Bith exchanged worried glances. “We have only what we are offering... trade has been down because of the attacks...” Feyan began. He didn’t get far. The Rodian spat near them and stormed out of the room, his toadie in tow. They were out the door when the toady’s foot caught and he went flying into his partners back. They landed in a crumpled, cursing heap outside the door and in full view of the other hunters who had left earlier. A roar of laughter exploded from the doorway. I watched Baal lower his fingers back into the fold of his arm. He looked at me with that lopsided grin of his that always seemed to show more teeth than necessary. “No need to be rude,” he said shrugging.

I realized the Bith were looking at us and the Pacithhip now with hopeful eyes. The Pacithhip stood and shouldered his blaster rifle. “I’ll take the job,” he said. His basic was somewhat garbled but I understood him fine. This large tusked badass was planning on saving the whole planet by himself.

Feyan looked somewhat relieved. “Excellent..perhaps if you three were to team-up...” but the Pacithhip silenced him with a gesture. “I work alone.”

I stood as well, “So do we.”

He snarled at us, or grinned..I wasn’t sure. “Good..just stay out of my way,” he said, turning and walking away.

“Fine, we’ll try to leave you enough so that you can refuel your ship and grab a banthaburger when you leave,” I spat after him. Butthead. I loved competition, but he was a jerk. “Come on Vi..Terminus...we’re wasting time,” Baal said from behind me. We walked out of the room leaving the Bith to silently hope they had made the right decision.

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4

— We had no sooner stepped out from the town hall into the reddish glow of the afternoon when we were accosted by a group of young Bith. Baal and I looked at each other as the children began yammering in some sort of alien dialect. I had no idea what they were saying but Baal was able to calm them and make sense of the jabbering. He looked up at me with what I think was concern (it’s hard to read Baal’s facial features sometimes). “They say there are 5 swoop members hitting a small club on the outskirts of the dome...a place called “Fantasy Five.”

“Let’s move,” I said, my voice a metallic crackle through the helmet’s modulator.

It took us no more than a few minutes to reach the spot. The Bith architecture was like it was on many planets; standard darkened duracrete mottled with transparasteel windows were the material of choice for the dwellings we raced through. Even with the uniformity of the materials, we could tell the minute we entered the “seedy” section. Graffiti covered some of the walls and, oddly enough, the Bith population thinned, giving way to twi’leks and what looked like nikto. Fantasy Five was butted up against a duracrete and steel retaining walls that made its way up the side of the dome. It was painted a multitude of colors and made up of three large spheres sitting

alongside one another.

The Pacithhip was face down in the dirt. Apparently he arrived before us, as his swoop was parked off to the side and being pawed over by a rough looking rodian in a blood red bandana. Two other rodians were busy stomping a mud hole in our friend and still two more were unholstering blasters. A crowd was packed in the doorway to the building and all traffic had cleared from the street. These Rodians knew what the score was and, given their success in sedating our competition, had no fear. Dropping to a knee, I leveled my LRB at the armed rodian nearest to me. Behind me I heard the Snap-hiss of Baal's lightsaber. Even under my body glove I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up. The rodian leveled his Merr-Sonn heavy blaster at the Pacithhip and spat out something in his native tongue.

His snout had just stopped moving when I let go with a blast from my LRB. Three muzzle flashes of red erupted and bolts leapt forward, one catching the rodian and spinning him while two more burned a tremendous hole in his ribcage. The other rodians froze in place just for a nano-second. Baal emerging from our cover with his lightsaber glowing brightly stirred them to action. The rodians attempt at offense was of little use. The huge cat swung his weapon with speed and deadly accuracy. In the space of seconds the screams of dismembered rodians filled the air. All that was left was a frightened Rodian cowering in the street, still intact. I didn't want to waste any time, so I grabbed him by the scruff of his collar and jerked him into an adjacent alley.

"How many other gangs are there?"

"Oota poodu newkii dannna!" he spat back at me. I pinned his hand against the duracrete wall and slowly began to squeeze the trigger on my LRB. If it was possible for the rodians eyes to grow any larger they did. Soon I had the city and time the next swoop gang was going to strike. Before I could squeeze him for any other info he bolted and ran. Baal was still conversing with the injured Pacithhip around the corner...I leveled my LRB and took my time. A single bolt made short work of the rodian, cutting him down at the mouth of the alley. Baal rounded the corner when he heard the shot. He threw me questioning look but didnt say anything. "Come on, it will be dark soon," I said and headed down the alley.

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The small domed city of Naba'nocheek was situated so that it fell in the shadow of a large mountain range. Baal and I had been waiting for no more than ten minutes, both of us situated on either side of the dome's entrance. Suddenly, the large blast door began to part and the air exchange system kicked on. Above the roar we could barely make out the whine of several repulsorlift engines. The first two weequay shot through the door like an out of control mynock.... As the third came through, Baal darted from the shadows and into the path of the final two weequay. They saw him just in time to swerve, and as they passed along either side of him he snapped his lightsaber to life and twisted quickly in the dust. The brilliant red lightsaber spun in one circular motion, severing the swoop operator's upper torso from the rest of their bodies. Their swoops continued and plowed violently into the dry ground. As the dust settled, Baal stood in a warriors stance, two weequay torsos lying at his feet and mouthing silent curses in

their throes of death.

The violent and gory beauty of it all mesmerized me. But there was work to do and it was time I did my part. I shouldered my LRB and lined up a shot on the trailing weequay who was oblivious as to what just happened. I squeezed off a shot and instead of three bolts this time, a single bolt leapt from my weapon. It was the downside of the Netfali Arms triple barrel blasters...due to a design flaw you were never quite sure what you were going to get. The single blast bolt was enough. It caught the weequay in the lower back and threw him violently out of his seat, leaving him a crumpled mass. By now the leading two weequay had spun around. In the fading sunlight their faces were impassive masks of wrinkled chestnut brown flesh. The air had kicked up due to the exchangers roaring to life and reddish dust blew around us.

I stepped up to Baal and we both stood maybe 80 meters away from the weequay. We could hear them re-routing energy into their rear thrusters and anticipated their attack. Things seemed to stop and I could almost smell their acrid stench as they leaned forward. Rear ion drives erupted in a blue glow and the swoops leapt towards us, covering the 80 meters as if it were nothing. I calmly kept my LRB at my hip and trained its muzzle on the swooper directly in front of me. At the last second both peeled away but not before Baal brought his glowing red blade up through the forward stabilizer on his weequay's swoop.

I dropped to a firing position and let loose with another shot. It caught the rear of the weequay's swoop as he rushed off and the bike went into a violent spin. He was able to correct it just as he slammed head first into a support column; the bike disappeared in a brilliant explosion, throwing the rider off to the side. "Vic!" I heard Baal call to me from where his weequay had crashed. The large cat had concealed his lightsaber and was kneeling over the fallen weequay. He was still alive. "Lets get him in some cuffs and out of here," I said as several waste disposal droids emerged from a nearby building and headed for the wreckage.

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Both weequay sat with their backs to the wall, visibly shaken. It was more than the near death experience though..Something had them spooked.

"Both have been acting this way ever since you entered the room," the Bith medic whispered to me. I suddenly realized what the weequay feared. My armor. The armor of the weequay legend of Terminus the Hunter. Good...always a bonus when you can keep your enemies off guard. While Baal watched the door outside I strolled over and regarded the first weequay from behind my helmet's mirrored visor. His partner was in bad shape..the one who almost hit the column. He lay there with more than a few tubes running in and out of him. I went through every weequay phrase I had heard back on Lazhan in my mind, but it had been so long since I had spoken the language I was more than a little rusty. This would be touch and go.

"You know who I am?" I managed.

The weequay studied me for a moment but slowly nodded his head. I noticed a subtle shift in his demeanor. One from outright fear to uncertainty. I cringed. The next words I spat out were supposed to be “Tell me where I can find your boss.” What came out was:

“Regroup and find me female cups”.

The weequay snorted laughter and rose to his full sitting position in defiance. It had been a long time since I was in Lazhan but I knew exactly what he spat at me. And it wasn't pleasant.

Only one thing to do...and I was glad the kid wasn't in the room to see it.

I unholstered my heavy blaster and pressed it to the temple of the Weequay on life support. With a squeeze of the trigger I sprayed weequay brain matter all over his now petrified partner. I dropped my helmet within a centimeter of the frightened Weequay and in a slow deliberate metallic voice I said “Tell me where I can find Jauxxson or suffer the same fate,” this time in perfect weequay. Somewhere behind me Baal had bust into the room and stood staring at the smoking hole in the dead weequays skull. His friend was singing like a bird and it was only a matter of time before we had the location of Jauxxson's pirate base...in the caverns of the Du'shalla mountain range. Now all we had to do was take out the Gammoreaean guards to get to him and we could call it a day.

I had just finished adjusting the low light settings on my helmet when Baal entered the small room the Bith had let me use. Grit had collected under the collar on my bodysuit and I was in dire need of a shower. I knew something was wrong when the big cat dropped onto a cot across from me and sat staring. “What?” I asked when the silence grew thick.

“Why did you kill that sentient?” He asked. I was running a needle along the visors edge cleaning out grit. It always seems to get right where you need it the least. “I needed information, I admit, it was messy -but effective. His partner told us everything we needed to know.”

“No..” Baal shook his head, “I mean, there were other ways to get that information, we could have...we..”

I dropped my helmet to my lap and turned to face him. “What Baal? Use harsh language and threats? These guys were weequay...you ever face up against a weequay? They are tough..and they don't screw around. We would still be sitting in there wagging our fingers and spewing empty threats right now if I didn't do what I did.” Baal stood and began pacing. “It's not right...Life is precious. To kill in battle is one thing, warriors expect it, but to kill a prisoner...and unarmed...” I didn't let him finish.

“Baal..spare me alright? These bastards would have killed you and me and ten Bith kids to get out of here if they could. Be glad I didn't ventilate his buddy as well,” I stood up and holstered my LRB. I grabbed my helmet from the bunk I was sitting on and when I turned Baal was in my face, his green eyes level with mine.

“You and me are going to have to get this straight at some point Vic, killing unarmed sentients

isn't right..”

I returned his gaze and intensity, “Tell ya what, when you develop a more effective level of interrogation, I’ll be happy to have this conversation.”

We sat staring at each other for another beat. I motioned him towards the door and he turned. He was about to walk through the doorway when I flipped the charge button on my LRB and it whined to life. He spun, instinctively, and dropped his hand to his side. Every muscle on his seven-foot tall frame was taught and I could see he was poised to strike. “Sorry, “ I said, a smirk creeping across my face, “Just getting ready”, and with that I pulled my helmet over my head. This time he let me leave the room first.

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6

— The Du’shalla mountain range wasn’t like your typical mountain range. The foliage that gathered around the base was volatile, a product of the harsh air and toxic winds that blew across the landscape. Baal and I snuck out of the city on a captured swoop and moved quietly into the mountains undergrowth. According to what the weequay had told me, the hidden passage was close by but Baal and I had little luck in finding it. After the better part of an hour searching, we hunkered down and waited for full darkness to make it’s way across the blood-red wasteland. My helmets low light setting slowly turned the world to a deep red glow. Shadows were illuminated and I could clearly make out Baal sitting a meter away slowly turning his lightsaber over and over in his huge three fingered gloves.

The Gamorreans had sped by twice. The modified skiff they were on was toting a heavy repeating blaster on the back, manned by a Gamorrean I nicknamed “Handsome”, due to the cybernetic prosthesis covering most of his face. We were trying to get a feel for their patterns, establish a rhythm. Unfortunately, we had been unsuccessful. These cyborged freaks were more than likely out for a joyride as opposed to actually pulling sentry duty.

“Look,” I said turning to Baal, “When these guys get close, I say we hit them..hard. I’ll lay down some fire and try to take out the skiff, you wade in and pull clean up duty..I’ll give you support...” Baal nodded and raised his lightsaber as if to ignite it. I grasped his arm and shook my head. “I think the element of surprise might be ruined if a meter long red light jumps to life here pal...” He nodded and gave a lopsided grin. Slowly he put the hilt near the ground and turned the lightsaber on. It ignited as the Gamorreans zoomed by. What Baal didn’t expect, and what I hadn’t thought of, was the “Snap-Hiss” sound the saber traditionally makes.

The Gamorreans didn’t need to see the blade, which was now embedded into the ground; the sound directed them right to us. The camo-armor I was wearing was great for hiding my presence

but crap for protection. With several tons of nightmare rushing towards us with a cannon spitting red-hot death I opened up with my light repeating blaster. _ Baal was already in motion, closing the gap between he and the skiff in several long strides. He moved like a blur, dodging energy bolts as if they were moving no faster than a Dewback. Several of my shots found their mark and tore through the hull plating of the skiff. It bucked and dipped to the right, the gunner instinctively jerking back on the trigger to the heavy repeater. _Blaster fire slammed into the ground beside me but I was up and moving as well. The small amount of underbrush that had provided us with cover was useless now and there wasn't any other cover available. I charged forward and targeted a Gamorrean that had been thrown from the skiff. I counted no less than five who had been out for their joy ride. I squeezed the trigger of the LRB and two bolts roared out, cutting the gamorrean down at the knees. _ Baal vaulted up and into the skiff, which was now hovering a mere three meters off the ground. Immediately two gammoreans pitched over the side and thudded into the ground like bags of wet duracrete. The only thing I could see from the ground in the skiff was the occasional flash of a red blade and some random blaster shots that harmlessly disappeared in the atmosphere.

The two gammoreans on the ground began to stir. These guys weren't only ugly, but tough as nails. I braced the LRB against my hip and squeezed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

I tried again and my effort was met with a metallic "Click". This wasn't good. At all. The gammoreans were on their feet now and moving towards me. I dropped the LRB to the ground and drew my heavy blaster. I unloaded on one but he didn't drop...instead he returned my shot with a cybernetic snarl and charged me. I dodged to the right and ducked into a roll. I came back up firing, which was a good thing as he was on top of me, drool and blood exploding from his mouth as the blaster bolt found a crease in his armor. _I pushed the huge body off of me, frantically searching for his partner. Baal had made short work of the other gamorrean though, and was headed in my direction. He began to say something but his voice was drowned out by the whine of starship engines roaring to life. Our eyes went towards the mountain where we could make out a distinct glow.

Baal took off in a sprint and I followed him, snatching my LRB up in the process. We found the hidden entrance to the base now wide open and unguarded. We charged in and dropped behind some crates that had been pushed against the wall. The cavernous room was illuminated by several glow-pylons whose light extended all the way to the ceiling. Scaffolding zigzagged up the side walls, providing a precarious walkway for Jauxxon and his crew. _Off to our right a console stood, rattling off some sort of launch sequence. I sprinted towards it but dove for cover as blaster fire rained down on me. Above me a particularly nasty looking Gotal spat a string of obscenities as he unloaded with his weapon. Apparently, this was Jauxxon and he had no intention of sticking around. _As he disappeared into the darkened area of the ceiling I made my way to the console. Baal was already halfway to the roof when I saw that we had no time. The cavern shook with the roar of engines and the ship Jauxxon had concealed above us leapt skyward towards the stars.

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___ The Twi'lek handed me several credit chits and offered up a toothy grin. "Are you sure you

wouldn't rather trade the swoops for a nice skyhopper?" he asked. I smiled back and slid the creds into my pocket. "No thanks, no need for a hopper," I replied and left him to fawn over his new acquisitions. With what was left after Jauxxson took off and our initial payment from the very grateful Bith, Baal and I had made quite a haul. I headed towards the domes main gate and the Skullduggery, throwing up a gloved hand towards Feyan who was watching from the balcony of his office. He waved back and made the Bith gesture for "thanks".

Baal was already in the cockpit prepping the ship for liftoff.

"I got our cash," I said as I dropped into the co-pilots seat." Baal seemed to not notice and continued to flip various switches.

"I still think the honorable thing to do would have been to let the Bith keep their credits," he said not looking at me. I sighed and dropped my head back against the seat. I was mentally and physically fatigued and in no mood to argue so I just shrugged it off. "Fair enough," I mumbled and closed my eyes.

I felt him stop stirring in his seat and cracked open an eyelid. Baal was looking out at the domed city and watching the Bith children play amongst the activity bars. "You aren't feeling maternal are you?" I asked. He shook his head and threw me a "kiss my ass" stare. "No Vic, I'm just thinking that we have only been working together for a short while but we have done a lot of good. The Bith will rise tomorrow and be able to go on about their business free of fear. "

"True," I said. "I'm heading to the 'fresher to reacquaint my body with water" I said and headed towards the back. Even late into the night his words stuck with me.

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Epilogue

We had been back on Garnib for just a few days when my comm. perked up. Baal and I had made a few in system runs but things had slowed down. I was expecting the comm. call to be Cylon informing me of work or a prospective client needing a trip to Celanon. I wouldn't have minded really...I had just spent the last trip to Celanon putting in an order for a brand spanking new armorer droid. Our little adventure on Clak'Dor VII had convinced me that I just didn't have the skill necessary to fix my lrb every time a piece of grit got into the internal lens housing.

"Yeah, Valance," I said into the comm as I bundled my parka around my shoulders. Rodbo Valance was an alias I had dreamed up to deal with the unfortunate circumstance of being a wanted fugitive. The parka wasn't helping; Even being far underground and heated by natural springs, it was still bitterly cold here in the ice caverns of Garnib. Several Balinaka slinked past me gibbering excitedly...apparently their local festival, the Wallarand was coming up and a ship full of independent artists had just arrived.

I stopped dead in my tracks when the answering voice came back to me. "I'm looking for Vic." It was a voice I had last heard on the planet of Valex 3, while me and Ket and Socatoa were scrambling to get off planet. A voice that assured me that we would meet up again in the future. "Klux?" I whispered into the comm.

"I'm at the Petit' Vernol, a tapcaf, meet me there in an hour," the voice said and my comm went

dead. I immediately commed Baal and we hooked up and headed for the tapcaf. _ The Petit Vernol was a small, dark shop on the edge of the city. As we entered, it took our eyes a moment to adjust from the blinding white outside to the candlelit café interior. The warmth and smell of homemade food was a welcome invitation. A small Vernol woman shuffled up to us and gestured to the room.

“Blees blind bursef a sleet,” she mumbled at us. I was clueless as to what she said so I turned to Baal.

“She said find yourself a seat,” he said smiling.

“Uh..thanks,” I said searching. Towards the back against the wall sat two men shrouded in shadow. “There we go,” I whispered. We crossed the room and wove around several patrons, never taking our eyes off of the duo.

A’sok and Klux sat with untouched drinks in front of them. Part of me was relieved to see them alive, another part weary as to what their presence here meant. _ “Have a seat,” Klux gestured to the empty seats. I introduced Baal to them and, maybe it was my imagination, but I thought that Baal and Klux locked eyes for an unusually long amount of time. Something was going on there, but I sure as hell wasn’t sure what. More force crap I figured. _ “What are you doing here?” I whispered.

Aso’k took a drink of something green and leaned forward. “You have no idea!...we went to Xanath 4 and met up with this big crazy Coynite, he was bodyguarding the princess see, and...” Klux silenced A’sok with a reassuring pat on the shoulder. _ “I went to see my Jedi master Da’Jony,” he said in the laid back voice of his. Baal’s ears perked up and he leaned in. “You are Jedi?!?!” he asked excitedly. Klux nodded and I could see if I didn’t intervene this whole conversation would get sidetracked.

“Look. Klux...what..HOW did you find me?” I asked feeling not the least bit paranoid. Klux drug his eyes from the cat and continued. “I saw it in a vision Vic, I saw an icy planet and heard the name “Garnib”, I just don’t know why I’m here or for what reason,” he said.

“Perhaps I can help with that,” a voice said from the table behind us. Everyone turned, and I dropped my hand to my concealed blaster. Behind us, turned now in his chair so that we could see his face, sat Jax Sheba’. _ He took a long drag of a cigaritto and smiled, letting the smoke drift through his teeth. “Would you gentlemen care to join me?”

I don’t know why, but for some reason the hair stood up on the back of my neck. But I wound up taking his offer anyway, and things just went downhill from there.