



**Purgis  
Treason**

**By  
Anthony Zuraski**

## *Terrin System, Planet Earth – Year 2756*

Purgis let out a sigh as he looked at the data pad on his desk. The title of the opened document was label 'The Moon Incident'. *A simple name for such a tragic event*, he thought. In the battle they had lost three Praetorian Guard, over one hundred soldiers, and four Quiscain Solar Guard, not to mention the damage to the colosseum. The Larrans had hit them hard with that ambush. *After seven months we still don't know who was behind it*, he thought.

Their investigation had turned up bodies of a Krelark family in the Larran base which led them back to the family's cargo ship. With the information found in the captains logs they knew how the Larrans got to the moon, and that security personnel were instructed to let them through but got to a dead end in security because the ones giving the orders were found dead. Several arrests had been made, but they were still no closer to the one pulling the strings. Purgis dismissed the thoughts as he put the data pad away. He glanced out the window as a stroke of lightning lit up the sky, a moment later thunder reverberated through the ground. A blinking light on the console in front of him told him the security sweep was complete.

"Thoughts for another day," he said to himself heading to the throne room.

“Purgis, how goes the investigation?” Emperor Detmus asked the Praetorian as he entered.

“Slow your imperial highness,” Purgis said with a bow. “We have several suspects that aided the Larran invasion but nothing solid yet.”

“Maybe I can help,” a voice said.

Purgis turned around to see a man in black armor. The armor was a lighter and more maneuverable design than standard imperial armor. It was black and light red with no markings and a hooded cloak. The newcomer also had a laser rifle slung over his back, holstered pistol and several knives.

“Mentor?” Purgis said with a smile on his face recognizing the man as Arturos Korvak, Purgis’ mentor in the Speculatores Core, and their current leader.

“Good to see you sir,” Arturos said saluting.

“Arturos is here to assist you in your investigation,” Detmus said. “Make sure you bring him up to date on everything.”

Purgis bowed. “As you command, my emperor.”

-----

“I didn’t realize the emperor was going to call you into this,” Purgis said standing in the Praetorian command center.

“Don’t take it personally sir,” Arturos said.

“The emperor still favors you, he is just growing concerned, and I don’t blame him.”

Purgis raised an eyebrow. “What do you know?”

Arturos looked around the command center, they were the only ones in the room. “Is this room secure?”

Purgis nodded. “Yes, I ran a sweep just before I headed to the throne room.”

Arturos moved to the window closing the cover before saying anything. “We have indications that an attack is coming and going to take place here.”

“At the palace? Impossible!” Purgis said.

“That is the Praetorian talking, you know better than that. I did train you after all,” Arturos said with a smirk.

“Do you have a timeframe?” Purgis asked.

“Can I look over your data from the investigation before I answer?” Arturos asked.

“Of course,” Purgis said motioning to the terminal on his desk.

After a few minutes Arturos frowned. “My intel says sometime in the next week, but I don’t have anything more that you it seems.”

-----

Emperor Detmus walked casually through the palace gardens, Purgis and Markus walking a few

steps behind. The hour was late, but the emperor insisted on going for a walk.

“I know you have been concerned for Empress Io, her illness is finally getting better. The Medicus inform me that she will make a full recovery in the next two weeks.” Emperor Detmus said stopping to pull an apple from a nearby tree.

“That is excellent news your imperial highness, I know the others will be relieved at the news,” Markus said.

Both Praetorians pulled their pistols out as movement to their right caught their attention. It was a small girl no older than six years old holding a silver canister. Emperor Detmus took a step back, fear in his eyes as he looked at the symbol on the canister.

Purgis crept closer as he holstered his pistol. He knelt on one knee about ten meters away from the child. A chill ran down his spine as he looked at the girl, she looked exactly like his younger sister Nara at her age.

“Hello little one, what are you doing here so late at night?” Purgis asked. “You know you’re not supposed to be here.”

“I have a present for the emperor,” the girl said.

“Well, why don’t you give to me,” Purgis said.

The girl shook her head. “Nah uh, I have to give it to him.”

"I'm sorry, but you can't," Purgis said. "You can give it to me, and I can give it to him later."

The girl put on a pouty face as she held onto the to the canister tightly.

"Kill her Purgis!" the emperor shouted. "Kill her now!"

Purgis stood up drawing his pistol, aiming it at the child but didn't shoot. He looked at the fear in her eyes and saw his sister.

"Kill her! That is an order!" Emperor Detmus said.

"No, you can't, he will be mad at me," the girl said with tears in her eyes running forward.

"Who?" Purgis asked. "Who will be mad."

A sound of a gunshot echoed, a heartbeat later everything went white.

-----

Purgis could hear a steady rhythmic beeping coming from somewhere. He slowly opened his eyes but there was a bright light shining down on his face causing him to close them again. He could feel something tight against his chest. He tried to reach up to feel what it was but found both his arms were restrained by something.

He opened his eyes, blinking several times to clear away the blurriness. He was in a medical room,

his chest, arms and both legs were strapped down to the medical bed.

“What is the meaning of this?” Purgis asked one of the Medicus personnel standing nearby. “Release me immediately.”

The woman ran out of the room, a moment later a Praetorian Guard walked in, his helmet clipped to his belt.

“Markus!” Purgis said. “What’s going on? Why am I restrained? What happened to the emperor?”

Markus had a stern look on his face. “The canister that the girl had exploded, a proton bomb. You are under arrest per the emperor’s orders.”

“Arrest? What’s the charge?” Purgis asked.

“Dereliction of duty and treason.” Markus said turning toward the door but stopping before walking out. “Rest up sir, you are going to need it.”

“Markus wait!” Purgis said pulling against the restraints trying to sit up. “You said the emperor’s orders, does that mean he is ok?”

Markus’ expression hardened. “He survived.”

-----

Arturos stood outside the court of law waiting for the emperor to arrive, he didn’t have to wait long. The emperor approached Arturos wearing his royal armor, red and gold in color. Instead of a helmet, he

wore a laurel of gold on his head. The scars from the attack were visible on the left side of his face.

“My emperor,” Arturos said with a bow. “May I have a moment?”

Detmus turned angrily at Arturos. “If this is some vain attempt to convince me to spare Purgis you can just stand there and be silent.”

“My em...” Arturos said.

“Do you think me an inept fool Legion Legate Korvak?” the emperor asked, his temper flaring. “Is my rule so flaunt with ineptitude that the leader of the Speculatores Core must walk all the way to the Court of Law to give me his council because I am incapable of making a decision by myself?”

Arturos stood paralyzed by the verbal assault. “I...”

“I have received over ten thousand requests in just the last three days begging me to spare Imperial Legate Radoon’s life,” the emperor said walking right up to elite commando. “It is as if everyone believes I do not know the service record of the Imperial Legate, or any of his accomplishments. I am so incapable that thousands within my own empire feel the need to point it out to me.”

“I meant no...”

“No!” the emperor interrupted. “Lie to me and I will shoot you myself right here! To stand here and

suggest I need your counsel in this matter is to spit on me and the empire itself!"

Emperor Detmus walked back up the hallway clenching his fists. He took a deep breath, releasing it slowly trying to calm down.

"You may not believe it Arturos, but I know Purgis very well and have much respect for the man," Detmus said looking at his hands. "Despite that fact, Purgis disobeyed my order which resulted in injuries to Markus, himself and his emperor. What if the empress or my son was with us that night? Punishment must be delivered, otherwise the word of the emperor is nothing, and means nothing."

Detmus walked past Arturos heading for the door, stopping as he reached the doorway to the courtroom. "Do not be here when I return and do not show yourself until I summon you."

-----

Purgis was dressed in simple clothing, kneeling on a raised pedestal that was half a meter tall, in the center of the stage. Durellium cables were attached from his bindings to the floor. Behind him in the stands were hundreds of officers, reporters and diplomats. Before him was Emperor Detmus Valarin sitting on an ivory throne, two Praetorian Guard flanking him.

A tall thin man dressed in the tan robes of a court official approached the throne, he bowed before turning to Purgis.

“Imperial Legate Purgis Taldor Radoon, you stand accused of treason and dereliction of duty to the empire endangering the life of our beloved Emperor Detmus Valarin, whom you swore to protect,” the court official said. “Do you have anything to say in your defense?”

Purgis knelt with his back straight, eyes looking directly at the court official. “No.”

The court official moved to the side as the emperor rose from his seat. “Do you have anything to say before I render my judgement?” the emperor asked standing before Purgis, his face a mask of neutrality.

“I have no excuse my emperor, my failure wounds me deeper than any blade could. At the same time, I rejoice at the sight of your good health,” Purgis said.

Detmus drew in a deep breath, letting it out slowly as he walked back to his ivory seat. “Purgis Radoon, stand.”

The cables securing Purgis slackened enough to let him stand on the pedestal.

“On the charge of dereliction of duty resulting in the endangerment of your emperor and empire, I find

your guilty," Detmus said. "On the charge of treason, I find you innocent."

Gasps and whispers from the audience rippled through the courtroom until the emperor raised his hand. "I pronounce you *missio ignominiosa*."

Purgis' eyes widened. *Missio ignominiosa*, dishonorable discharge from the service of the empire, he thought. He would lose everything, all his possessions were now the property of the empire, but he was allowed to live.

"Furthermore, you will be given a hunter's license of the empire and spend the rest of your life purging the empire of the filth within it," Emperor Detmus said. "With this license, you will hunt down the criminals of the empire and bring them to justice until such time that I, or one of my successor's releases you from this obligation. I declare judgement rendered, take the guilty from this courtroom and deliver him to his punishment."

Purgis was escorted to a small room where two marks were branded to his chest, one was the brand of *missio ignominiosa*, the other a mark of an imperial hunter. Without a word he was handed his license and taken to a side door that led to a small alley where he was released.

The new hunter stood in the alley staring down at the marker token in his hands, his mind in a whirl. He glanced back at the door, unsure what to do for the

first time in his life. Part of him was hoping to wake up from this nightmare, the other part had hoped for a quick execution.

Purgis dropped to his knees feeling hollow inside. *I've lost everything*, he thought not referring to any of his possessions. *Why did he let me live? I don't know...*

"I never saw that coming," a voice said interrupting his thoughts.

"Arturos?" Purgis said still trying to wrap his head around everything. "Why are you here? I don't know if the emperor would want your talking to a..."

"To a what?" Arturos asked.

"A... verbero," Purgis whispered, using the word for someone that deserves a whipping.

"You are not a verbero," Arturos said.

"Everything happened so fast. The girl, the bomb, the sentencing," Purgis said not looking up. "In just two weeks I went from Praetorian to gutter trash. How did I end up here? Why was I not executed?"

"I don't know," Arturos said shaking his head. "It seems you still held favor with the emperor, despite what happened. People will not see this as a favorable outcome, and the emperor may find more opponents within the magistrates because of it."

"But why?" Purgis asked. "I should be executed."

Arturos pulled out a data pad, handing it to Purgis. "Do you recognize this symbol?"

Purgis scrutinized the image. "It's the symbol that was on the cannister, but I don't know it."

"Neither do I, it is a snapshot of the security footage from that night. Security footage that has been erased except that image. I think our emperor wants you to investigate," Arturos said. "This was sent to me during your trial with instructions to give it to you."

"To me?" Purgis asked. "I... I can't."

"Yes you can, or are you going to throw away everything the emperor just sacrificed to keep you alive?" Arturos asked. "Are you really going to just sit there and bring more shame to him?"

"Do you really believe that?" Purgis asked.

"Yes, I do," Arturos said as he headed toward the end of the alley. "That data pad also contains all of your notes on your investigation of the Moon Incident."

"Where are you going?" Purgis asked.

"To look into something, I'll be in touch," Arturos said rounding the corner. "Salvum itineribus Purgis."

Purgis looked down at the data pad, then his marker token. "'Salvum itineribus my friend.'"

"Purgis!" a voice shouted from the other end of the alley. A skinny man with red hair wearing blue mechanic overalls ran toward him waving his arms.

"Bryce? What are you doing here?" Purgis asked raising an eyebrow. *Why are so many people I know*

*travelling down this particular alley right now, Purgis thought.*

“Umm I’ve come to rescue you, duh,” Bryce said.

“This isn’t a good time Bryce,” Purgis said with a frown. Bryce and Purgis grew up together with Purgis’ sister Nara, during their youth the three were inseparable.

“Really, because it looks like you need saving to me,” Bryce said. “I mean you are too ugly to be a damsel in distress, but since there aren’t any damsels around, I might as well save you.”

Purgis let out a sigh. “Why aren’t you on Cobus at your shop?”

“Ugh, I thought you were supposed to be smart or something,” Bryce said. “I have already explained this twice, I’m here to save you.”

-----

### ***Kapteyn System, planet Cobus***

Two weeks had passed since Purgis’ trial, and the hunter was still sulking with an icepack on his head. Every night since the trial Purgis wandered out into the city getting drunk then getting into fights with anyone and everyone around him, and every night Bryce and his droids would retrieve him. They were in The Iron Gear, Bryce’s shop, in the R&D section. It

was Bryce's private workshop while the rest of his people built the armor and droids Bryce designed.

Bryce was an armorsmith, someone that crafts armor, weapons, or droids. In Bryce's case he excelled in the design and construction of all three. The armorsmith had just secured his seventh contract with the empire to design armor for them.

"You know you should be happy, or at least be helpful," Bryce said. "I am making you some new armor and weapons."

Purgis fidgeted with the hunter marker in his hands. "Bryce... I..."

"You know, customary phrases at a time like this would be something like... Bryce you're the greatest, or thanks Bryce my best friend ever, or thanks Bryce, I'll talk to Nara and get her to finally kiss you," Bryce said as he worked on a large suit of armor.

"Nara what?" Purgis asked finally paying attention.

"What about Nara?" Bryce asked looking at Purgis with a nervous look. "Anyway, could you bring me that crate over there? The one with the wires sticking out."

Purgis let out a chuckle. Bryce had a crush on Nara ever since they were children. Nara looked at Bryce like a little brother, but the hunter suspected she might have feelings for the little mechanic that she denied even to herself.

"You know Bryce, you don't have to do this," Purgis said setting the crate down. "I can figure this out on my own."

Bryce looked at him appalled at the suggestion. "I knew it! I just knew it!"

Confusion crossed the hunter's face, "knew what?"

"You want Nara to hate me, don't you!" Bryce said pointing an accusing finger. "If she knew I was able to help you and didn't, she would never speak to me again... I thought we were friends."

Purgis put his hands in the air. "We are friends, I just..."

"Just want Nara to hate me! That's what!" Bryce said.

Purgis' shoulders slumped as he let out a sigh. "Fine, you win. You can help me."

Bryce smiled. "Good, now that's settled, hand me that wrist module."

Purgis grabbed the module setting it off. A rocket streaked across the workshop, passed Bryce's head exploding against the far wall. The armorsmith glared at Purgis, his arms crossed.

The hunter stared with wide eyes at the fire as the suppression system put out the fire. "You keep live rounds here? In the open?"

"Well duh, how else do I know if they are going to fit and work?" Bryce said still glaring at the hunter.

“In all my years here... I have only set them off three dozen times or so, and I only almost died twice.”

“What!” Purgis said.

“You know that you ask what a lot, right?” Bryce said. “Do you need a hearing aid or something?”

“My hearing is fine,” Purgis said.

Bryce moved his mouth without saying anything causing Purgis to cross his arms. “I know you didn’t say anything.”

The armorsmith burst out laughing. “Haha I love that one, Signus falls for it ever time.”

Purgis looked around. “Where is Signus? I haven’t seen that droid of yours since I arrived.”

“Which part?” Bryce asked going back to work on the armor.

-----

After weeks of work, Purgis’ armor was finally complete. It was black and bronze with a black cape. His helmet was similar to imperial design with a black plume that ran from forehead to the back of his head and a T shaped visor. The armor had an ACI in the left wrist and small rockets and stun darts in the right. Two laser pistols hung in holsters at his sides. Scanners, video, audio and image recorders were all installed in his armor system as well.

“Bryce... this is amazing,” Purgis said going through his HUD menu. “I don’t know what to say other than thank you. I will pay you back for this.”

“You will not!” Bryce said sternly. “I won’t have Nara thinking that I am charging you for this.”

Purgis smiled. “Ok, but I will take you out for drinks or something.”

“Deal,” Bryce said. “Seriously Purgis, anything you need, I want to help you.”

Purgis smiled as he nodded. “Hey... wait. What is... party time protocol?”

Bryce stepped to the side out of the hunter’s view putting his hands over his mouth stifling a giggle.

“Oh, that is a very deadly weapon, try it.”

“In here?” Purgis asked.

“It’s not armed but will still go through the motions for you,” Bryce said with a wide grin.

Purgis pressed his left index finger and thumb together three times activating voice command mode.

“ACI online,” a synthetic female voice said in his helmet.

“Activate Party Time Protocol,” Purgis said.

“Activating Party Time Protocol,” the ACI said.

A small compartment on Purgis’ pauldrons opened up launching two small spheres that hovered above the hunter. The spheres lit up projecting an array of colors as they played fast techno sounding

music. Confetti exploded out of the top of Purgis' helmet.

"What the..." Purgis said turning to Bryce. He saw the armorsmith dancing and laughing as the confetti rained down around them. The hunter couldn't help but laugh. "Is there anything else I should know about this armor?"

"Nope," Bryce said with a grin. "Now come, I have another surprise for you."

They entered the starport, then entered dock G7. In the dock was a black and red Quiscain Gunship class vessel.

"This is the Reaver, and she's all yours." Bryce said spreading his arms out wide.

Purgis' mouth hung open for a moment. "Bryce... I..."

"You are welcome," Bryce said. "It's already registered in your name, along with all your weapons and armor. The ship is also crewed by ten droids."

Purgis hugged Bryce, lifting the little man off the ground.

"Can't..." Bryce squeaked out trying to breath.

"Sorry," Purgis said setting his friend down.

"I do have one last gift, but I'm afraid you will break my bones if I give it to you," Bryce said taking a step back.

"You have given too much as it is Bryce." Purgis said.

"I have a confession Purgis, this isn't just from me," Bryce said growing serious. "Nara called me after we found out what was happening, and we agreed to help you out. The armor I made, but most of this other stuff, including the ship was... donated by others. You have done so much for others during your years of service, saved so many lives that some of us wanted to give back to you. I am just the face of their generosity."

Purgis removed his helmet as he knelt down, so he was face to face with the armorsmith. "Who did all this?"

"They don't want me to say anything other than their thanks." Bryce said.

Purgis wiped away the tears that were forming. "I will have to call Nara and thank her."

"You won't get through. She called me just before they were shipping out for... who knows where," Bryce said. "Now that all of that sappy stuff is out of the way, let's meet your new partner."

"Partner?" Purgis said standing up.

The Reaver's loading ramp lowered, a white and black droid walked down towards them. Purgis recognized it as CX-7 combat droid.

"Greetings Master Purgis, I am Nova," the droid said. "I am trained in piloting, hand to hand combat and marksmanship, I am honored to serve you."

"Nova's great, and I have some upgrades we can install in him once we get time," Bryce said.

Purgis' com chirped; it was Arturos. "Bryce, can I use the transmitter on the Reaver? I have an important call coming in."

Bryce shrugged. "It's your ship, why ya asking me?"

"I'll be right back," Purgis said running up the ramp activating the holo-transmitter. "I'm here Arturos, line is secure."

"I have a lead Purgis, but you will need to leave now if you want a chance to capture him," Arturos said.

"Who?" Purgis asked.

"The man responsible for the attempts on the emperor," Arturos said.

Purgis couldn't hide his shock. "Why aren't you apprehending him?"

"Because we are deployed somewhere else, and because I don't have enough evidence to convince the emperor," Arturos said. "He is moving soon, and I don't know when we will find him again."

Purgis clenched his fists. "Send me the details."

-----

The Reaver was on its way to the Procyon system, specifically the planet Keneus. It was a farming planet

where a variety food was grown for the people of the empire.

“Exiting spatial aperture in ninety seconds, exit aperture is clear,” Nova said.

The Reaver exited the spatial tunnel, the planet Keneus loomed in the distance. Spatial engines in starships created a spatial tunnel, a wormhole in space. The spatial tunnel could compress up to ten lightyears of space, into a shorter distance, at a time so ship would perform multiple jumps between star systems depending on the distance.

Purgis looked at the sensors. Keneus had dozens of cargo freighters around it and a Valarin Warship defending the system. The comm chirped drawing the hunter’s attention.

“Master Purgis, we are being hailed,” Nova said.

“Open a channel,” Purgis said taking a seat in the captain’s chair.

The holo-transmitter flared to life; the image of an imperial officer appeared. “This is the Warship Hibernia. Identify yourself and state your business.”

“This is the Reaver out of the Kapteyn system,” Purgis said. “I am imperial hunter Purgis Radoon in pursuit of a mark that I believe has taken refuge on this planet.”

“Radoon!” The officer said looking to his right. After a moment the officer turned back toward Purgis. “You are cleared to land Hunter Radoon.”

The transmission ended but a moment later the comm chirped again.

"It is a request for a secure transmission from the Hibernia," Nova said.

Purgis nodded. "Do it."

The holo-transmitter flared to life again, this time the image of a woman in captain's uniform appeared. "Sir," the woman said saluting.

"Captain Ortega, there is no need to salute, I am not an imperial officer anymore," Purgis said feeling a little uncomfortable.

Ortega stood at ease. "Sir, if there is anything thing you need..."

Purgis shook his head raising a hand to stop her. "Captain, I can not ask you to do anything beyond your mandate," Purgis said.

"But sir..." Ortega said.

"It's just Purgis now Olivia, please," Purgis said.

Olivia nodded with a sad expression. "Yes sir... er I mean Purgis."

Purgis smiled. "The man I am after is extremely dangerous and must not escape the system Olivia, if a ship rushes out of here, I wouldn't mind the Hibernia detaining it for questioning."

Olivia's eyes lit up. "Of course, I understand."

"Thank you, now I must go," Purgis said.

"Bonum venationis Purgis, and Salvum itineribus," Ortega said.

Purgis smiled as he translated the ancient dialect. *Good hunting and safe travels*, he thought.

Every imperial soldier was taught the ancient dialect of Latin in the academy. The ancient romans were the first government to conquer the globe over two eons ago, putting one government in charge of every human in existence. Since then, the government has changed several times, usually the result of a civil war, but the planet remained united in the end. To honor the ancient romans the empire taught the ancient dialect to all its soldiers.

Purgis stood and saluted. "Salvum itineribus Olivia Ortega."

"Move us out Nova," Purgis said as the transmission ended.

"Yes master," Nova said.

"Just call me Purgis."

"Of course, Master Purgis."

-----

Purgis stood on the dock looking out over the lake, his helmet clipped to his belt. Several boats were in the lake, locals out for a relaxing evening. In the center of the large lake was an island with a zoo on it, that was where his target was supposed to be in two hours. Purgis glanced back at the hovercar he had

rented. Getting into the zoo was easy, but in his armor, he was going to stand out.

“This is going to be messy Nova, there will be a lot of civilians there, but if he is the one responsible for the assassination attempts...” Purgis said scratching his chin. “Come on, I have an idea.”

The hovercar parked in the parking lot, the windows tinted dark enough so no one could see in. Purgis scanned the faces in the crowd looking for a match, after an hour of searching, he got one.

“Over there,” Purgis said pointing. “He just got out of that vehicle. Cross reference the plates in the imperial database.”

“Yes Master Purgis,” Nova said. “Vehicle belongs to a Mr. Velus McGrane. He was the sole owner of the McGrane Chemicals until the company was dissolved by order of Emperor Detmus Valarin, McGrane lost all assets. He has several arrests...”

“That’s enough Nova, I get the idea,” Purgis said. “Let’s go, and don’t follow him too closely.”

-----

“Are you sure you can kill the target?” Velus asked the man sitting next to him on the bench.

“He will be dead, I guarantee it,” the man responded. “But it will take some time, we must wait

for the right opportunity. After your last several failed attempts, security has been tightened.”

Velus frowned at the comment, although he couldn't deny it. For three years he had been trying to kill Emperor Detmus, spending almost every denarii he had in the process.

“As agreed, ten percent has been deposited into your account, the rest will follow once the mission is complete,” Velus said.

The man held his index and middle finger to his left ear for a moment, a frown creeping across his face. “It appears you were followed.”

“Impossible!” Velus said.

“A white combat droid has been following you, and a large hunter following him,” the man said standing up walking away.

Velus waited a moment before standing up to leave. He moved through the crowd going into a restroom.

“I fear they have discovered me Master Purgis,” Nova said into his comm. “Velus has gone into a restroom, and his accomplice has fled in the opposite direction.”

“We stay on Velus,” Purgis said moving up next to Nova. “Circle around the building and check for another exit.”

“Yes Master Purgis.”

Velus peaked around the edge of the building at the restroom across the street. He saw the white combat droid run around the building, stopping at the rear exit. A moment later a large man in armor walked out of the restroom surveying the crowd. The man was close to three meters tall in his armor.

“It can’t be!” Velus said. “The fallen Praetorian has come hunting for me!”

Velus turned to leave running into a child, knocking it over. The child started to cry as Velus glanced back to find the hunter looking straight at him.

“Damn!” Velus cursed sprinting down the street.

Purgis sprinted after the man. “Head for the parking lot Nova, he’s going to make a break for it.”

“Yes Master Purgis.”

Velus pulled a laser pistol firing it back at Purgis causing several people in the crowd to cry out. The shots went wide but forced the hunter to take cover behind a stone lamp post drawing one of his pistols.

Purgis chased after his target but did not fire, there were too many civilians. Velus rounded the next corner firing his pistol into one of the displays. The shots went through the forcefield generator then at the creature within the exhibit.

Velus sprinted on as the creature came charging out of the exhibit right in front of Purgis. The creature was an Abyssian Crab, standing almost four meters

tall, it had two short legs, and a thick red exoskeleton. The creature had two large arms similar to a gorilla with pincers instead of hands, and a large gaping maw filled with razor sharp teeth, white eyes and an antenna on its head.

“Stall him Nova, I’ve got a problem here,” Purgis said backing away from the creature.

Patrons in the area were screaming and running away making the creature more agitated. Purgis smiled as an idea came to him. He pressed his left index finger and thumb together three times activating voice command mode.

“ACI online,” a synthetic female voice said in his helmet.

“Activate Party Time Protocol,” Purgis said.

“Activating Party Time Protocol,” the ACI said.

As before, a small compartment on Purgis’ pauldrons opened launching two small spheres that hovered above the hunter. The spheres lit up projecting an array of colors as they played fast techno sounding music. Confetti exploded out of the top of Purgis’ helmet. The Abyssian Crab let out a hiss at the display, slamming its fists on the ground.

“That’s right, ignore the screaming people and pay attention to me,” Purgis said drawing his second pistol. “Arm stun darts.”

“Stun darts armed,” the ACI said.

Purgis sprinted into the habitat firing two shots at the crab, not enough to hurt it, but enough to keep its attention. The crab charged after the hunter, hissing angrily. The hunter holstered his pistols as he turned to face the creature. The crab leapt; its mouth opened wide. Purgis fired his stun darts, striking the creature in the roof of its mouth. The creature landed on Purgis, slamming the hunter to the ground.

The hunter just rolled the unconscious creature to the side as four zoo security soldiers ran into the habitat. "It's stunned, but I don't know how long it's going to last."

"We'll take care of the creature, but you will have to come with us for questioning," one of the security men said as more shots rang out from the direction of the parking lot.

"The terrorist that let that thing out is having a shoot-out with my droid, I can't let him escape," Purgis said squaring off against them. "Either help me or get out of my way."

The men looked at each other. "I'll come with you while they secure the creature," one of the men said.

They arrived at the parking lot, Velus was leaning against his hovercar holding his shoulder, Nova was about a dozen paces away with a rifle trained on the man. Purgis and the security officer approached, their pistols drawn but Velus just smiled at them.

"You can't stop it fallen Praetorian, everything is in motion, and it can't be stopped," Velus said.

"Nova, contact the starport. Give them the description of the other man and see if they can locate him." Purgis said. "We'll see if this one talks once we get him to a detention cell."

Velus frown as he pulled something from his jacket. "Not gonna happen. Death to the emperor!" he shouted as he pressed the button on the detonator in his hand.

The hovercar behind Velus exploded throwing everyone away from the vehicle. Purgis sat up to see the burning corpse of Velus next to the wreckage.

"I need fire suppression to the east parking lot immediately!" the security officer said into his comms.

"Nova!" Purgis said looking for his droid.

"Here Master Purgis." Nova said standing up, his chest covered in shrapnel.

"You're damaged," Purgis said.

"Yes master, but I can be repaired," Nova said. "Are you injured?"

"I'll be fine." Purgis said looking back to the corpse. "Anything from port control?"

"Yes master, he is departing the port now in an interceptor class vessel," Nova said.

"Damn it!" Purgis said running to his hovercar. "Hurry Nova!"

-----

The Reaver lifted off the ground, Nova plotting an intercept course but there was no way they were going to catch their quarry without help. Thankfully Captain Ortega agreed to intercept the fleeing vessel.

Ortega stood on the bridge in front of her chair, her hands behind her back. "Open a channel to that vessel."

"Aye captain, channel open," the officer said.

"Vessel Grinx, this is the Imperial Warship Hibernia. Power down your engines and hold position, any attempt to change course or escape will be seen as an act of aggression and you will be fired upon." Ortega said.

"Captain, the Grinx is taking an attack posture and powering her weapon systems," an officer said.

"Red alert," Ortega said sitting down in her chair as the lights along the floor lit up red. "Raise shields and defensive grids. Bring weapons online and target that vessel, generators and engines only, we want to capture that vessel, not destroy."

"Aye captain," one of the officers said.

The Grinx exploded in a ball of fire startling Ortega. "What happened?"

"Unknown captain, it just exploded," one of the officers said.

-----

Purgis was back on Cobus, Bryce was repairing his armor and Nova after the confrontation with Velus. They had sent Arturos all the information they had been able to get, but it wasn't much. The identity of the man Velus met was Ottmir Kreeg, a known smuggler.

"There was nothing else you could have done Purgis," Arturos' holoimage said. "You interrupted their plans, and both men are out of the picture. We will take it from here and see what we can find out on our end."

The hunter didn't like it but didn't know what else to do right now so he numbly nodded.

"Don't sulk," Arturos said with a smile. "There are still plenty of other criminals, and who knows, maybe you'll stumble on more information while you are out there."

Purgis managed a smile as he nodded. "If I find anything I will pass it along."

Arturos nodded as the transmission ended.

"So, Nova is all fixed up and good as new, your armor will take a few more days." Bryce said walking up the ramp to the Reaver.

"Thanks Bryce," Purgis said taking a seat. He felt exhausted and promised himself some sleep soon.

“Oh hey, did I tell you I own a planet now?”  
Bryce said.

“A what?” Purgis asked thinking he must have heard his friend wrong.

“You know, those round things in space people live on,” Bryce said rolling his eyes.

“I know what a planet is, how did you end up owning one?” Purgis asked.

“Yeah, how cool is that?” Bryce said. “It was payment from the emperor for something I did for him.”

“A planet as payment? For doing what?” Purgis asked.

“If I told you that, I would have to kill you.”  
Bryce said with a smirk. “Not that your tiny brain would understand it anyway.”