

## Chapter 1

Cash Culasso was having a bad day.

He was currently being chased by a creature, a rather large creature called a Flux. This in of itself doesn't sound intimidating, however, any interstellar traveler worth their salt (or slickspice; nobody's really picky) will know that a Flux is a very dangerous creature. It feeds off of interdimensional energy and can travel through spacetime at will. Of course, the traveling through spacetime is only able to occur when the Flux is charged with interdimensional energy, and the one chasing Cash was not. This was largely because the nearest interdimensional rift was on the other side of Rast - the planet Cash was currently exploring - and because nobody was doing any sort of wizardry or powering up a warp drive nearby. If the Flux had been able to travel through spacetime, Cash would be a dead man.

Cash was not currently a dead man. He was alive, and he wasn't human. And he had no intention of dying anytime soon.

Cash sprinted towards a stone wall and jumped over it, plunging freefall into a chasm. He didn't necessarily have to; he did it mainly for the thrill, for the fun, as he liked to do. He landed on his speeder bike, gunning the engine and silently thanking himself for installing padded seats.

He brought the front of the bike up in a maneuver that would have veteran pilots shaking with nerves, at the same time turning on the radio and letting the rock music wash over him. He laughed out loud; the thrill of the chase, the adrenaline rushing through him, it all was what he craved.

He had almost forgotten about the Flux behind him. But not quite; some part of him, under the two-thirds of his brain that were rocking out to the Alfranian heavy metal music (one of his favorite genres) was still aware of his pursuer, and so he brought the bike around in a swooping motion and fired the blasters. Two bolts of white energy fired, slamming into the large, electric blue creature. It roared and ran along the wall behind him.

Cash swore, but his words were drowned out by the music. He had forgotten that Flux weren't affected by gravity as most beings were; they could ignore it, or shift it for their own personal use, and other tricks as such.

Cash's bike was steadily declining; it wasn't quite meant to be in the air for too long. It could hover indefinitely, but when driving, it needed to be closer to the ground. Cash wanted to get a hover speeder, which was more than capable of in-atmosphere flight, but they were expensive. And besides, he thought, this little bike has served me well over the cycles.

Cash swooped just under the reach of the Flux's claws, shooting towards the barren wasteland below the cliff. The wastelands of Rast were a popular tourist attraction for some reason; apparently people liked to sit in the heat and walk for miles to see the reddish-orange sand dunes. Cash personally didn't see the beauty that others claimed was there, but he definitely knew that there were good things about it - specifically the treasures he knew were hidden below the surface, in the labyrinth of ancient sandstone tunnels.

That was actually why he was there; Cash was a smuggler, a raider, a bounty hunter, whatever he needed to be to get paid. Cash liked money.

He gunned the engine again, shooting on a burst of speed, and the bike dipped into the sand as it reached the dune level. Cash grunted as he yanked the control yoke up, pulling the bike out of the sand that would have gotten all up into his eyes had he not been wearing flight goggles. Even still, a good deal of sand got into his eyes, hair, and clothing.

The sand had also done another job; it had temporarily blinded the Flux. The sand had gotten into three of the creature's four large eyes, aggravating it beyond imagination.

Cash hadn't meant to dip the front of the bike into the sand; that was very dangerous. You never knew if there was a rock, a discarded flight helmet, or a dead body in there that your bike would impact on and all of a sudden you would be on your last flight.

The Flux had shaken most of the dust out of its eyes and roared with anger as the bike receded into the distance, and it began to glow with a blue light. A display built into Cash's goggles showed him this view from the rearview camera, and his eyes widened. He swore as the beast disappeared, reappearing right in front of him. Cash yelled defiantly as he brought the tip of the bike up, attempting to get over the flux, but the bike refused to respond fast enough, bringing the tip of the bike slamming into the Flux's hard skin.

Cash responded quickly, tapping his chest to undo the harness that kept his backpack on the bike. He did a backflip off the bike, landing on his feet in a defensive stance. He unsheathed his knife, the blade a glowing white triangle of metal.

"Hey, there," he said, slowly. "You see my little friend here? This is a Faol Straightcut. It'll slice right through your armored hide like bread-cream, so back. It. Off."

The Flux was not capable of intelligent conversation, but it was angry at the fact that its prey wasn't running away, and that it seemed to be attempting to engage in intelligent conversation. It was also confused, but mainly angry.

Cash didn't wait for the Flux to make a decision. He dove between the creature's legs, grabbing his backpack from the wreckage as he slid underneath the now-enraged Flux.

The Flux whirled around and swiped a claw at Cash, who ducked instinctively. He ran off, sprinting to escape the Flux.

The reader may now be wondering why Cash did not simply kill the creature with his knife. This is because of three reasons. First, the knife would not have been able to kill the creature, only pierce the first layer of its hide. Second, if he had inadvertently injured a vital area of the creature, it would cause a large explosion of interdimensional energy which could kill Cash and any other living creature in the general vicinity of about ten kilometers. And third, Cash was rather impulsive - part of what made him a good raider and smuggler - and hadn't thought to try to injure the creature to aid in his escape.

Now, sprinting away from the creature, he almost regretted stealing the Prism from its sanctuary. Of course, it wasn't the only Prism. There were a total of twenty-one Prisms across the galaxy, and Cash had collected fifteen of them - sixteen, including this one. The fifteen that he had already gathered were safe in a vault on his ship, the *Adventurous Valor*. It was his pride and joy, a little beat up, and currently landed somewhere out in the wastelands. Cash always parked his ship far off from where he would be raiding, which made it harder to escape in events such as this, but also helped him avoid suspicion.

For this Prism, he had landed the *Adventurous Valor* out in the middle of the wasteland, then taken his speeder bike over to the cliffs he had jumped off of less than five minutes prior. He had then parked the speeder bike twenty feet below the top of the stone wall at the edge of the sanctuary, scaled the wall, and navigated a series of traps, guardians, and corridors to get to the Prism Room. After that, he had grabbed the Prism - a translucent blue pyramid that radiated strange energy. Upon his escape from the sanctuary, he had been quite surprised to find the Flux waiting for him, next to a strange man in a black cloak. The man had released the Flux and the chase had begun.

And now, the Flux was gaining.

Cash had an idea. Well, not exactly an idea - it was more of a half-formed thought, but it started to take form in Cash's head as he ran.

He whirled around, holding up the knife. The Flux's momentum sent the knife deep into its stomach, puncturing one of its internal organs. The Flux roared and shuddered as it began to glow, interdimensional energy gathering around it.

"Oh, man," Cash groaned. The Flux was about to blow. He had to get out of there, but how? It was then that he realized his plan had a lot of flaws.

Impulsively, Cash dove down, letting go of the knife and digging himself into the sand beneath the creature. He submerged himself in the gritty stuff, holding his breath. He began to lose consciousness and was only vaguely aware of the explosion above him as he passed out.