

Chapter 4

The man was not having a good day.

He was a very interesting man, though most of his interesting aspects will not be revealed at this time. He was watching a curious display mounted on a wall. The display showed the galaxy, and precisely twenty-one blinking dots of different colors within it.

It is quite easy to discern what the dots represent, so it will not be explicitly stated. The author will continue to put up the illusion that there is a large element of mystery in this scene.

The man had actually been having a good day, up until rather recently. He had been observing the progress of fifteen of the dots - so close together physically that they were represented only by a bright, multicolored, pulsing dot. They had arrived on the planet Rast, in a far sector of the galaxy, and a secondary display now showed the planet of Rast, next to the display that showed the galaxy. On this display, the man had watched as one of the dots on Rast - separate from the fifteen that had arrived there earlier - had begun to blink, and then to move towards the location of the first fifteen dots.

But the dot had stopped moving, and then stayed in one place for about an hour until it started moving back to its original location - the location of the Rast sanctuary.

That was why the man was not having a good day.

The dot's movements meant that the raider he had hired had lost the Prism. That had seemed impossible, with the ease that the raider had reported upon obtaining the other fifteen Prisms. But that meant that there was more resistance being put up on Rast, or more worryingly, the raider was losing his touch. And the raider he had hired was the only raider he had met in all his years that could possibly do the job.

He was about to hail the raider and demand a report when the fifteen Prisms started moving towards the Rast sanctuary. That in of itself was a worrying development; the man had specifically instructed not to take

the other prisms too close to the sanctuaries before obtaining the next Prism on the list. And the raider had never returned to the sanctuaries a second time in the past six months (the time it had taken him to obtain the first fifteen prisms), but the man was comforted only in the fact that it was probably a contingency plan of sorts.

The man's chief fear was that the raider would betray him and sell his loyalties to somebody else, and in doing so, sell the valuable Prisms to somebody else. The man had plenty of enemies who would buy the Prisms just to keep them from him, or to destroy them. And there were others who knew the power of the Prisms - a piece of knowledge which the raider was not in possession of - who could inform the raider of the fact and purchase the Prisms for a ridiculous sum of money.

He finally decided to go get some sleep - being up too long would drain him and make him unable to function the way he needed to - and left the displays running as he made his way to his quarters and fell asleep.

The *Adventurous Valor* shot through the Rastic dawn, heading rapidly towards the cliffs. Within a matter of minutes they had landed at the Rast sanctuary.

"So, here's how it's gonna go down. You're going to lead me into the Prism room, disabling any traps and whatever as you go. If I even so much as stub my toe, one of you is going to get shot. And I don't use stuns on a regular basis. Got it?"

Mej and Alistair nodded at Cash as he finished his instructions. Cash pulled up the scanner on his dashboard - a short-range scanning device that could detect something that the Prisms emitted, though Cash couldn't remember what exactly was emitted. He nodded with satisfaction as it picked up a large amount of whatever-it-was coming from his ship along with a smaller amount of whatever-it-was coming from inside the sanctuary.

He changed the primary scanner view to infrastructure detection, then overlaid the prism scanner's view over it. Sure enough, in the central room of the Sanctuary, the scanner picked up the Prism.

"Well, you didn't lie to me," Cash said, slightly surprised but mainly smug. "Good, good. Alright, into the sanctuary. And no funny business; remember I've got a gun trained on each of you at all times."

He patted his holsters and slung two more guns into his shoulder holsters. Armed to the teeth was how he liked to go in. He strapped daggers to his thighs and slipped another into each boot, and put one in the holster at his side.

"Now, we're gonna go grab that Prism," Cash said, opening the cell doors and leading the two captives out. He checked that the energy binders were secure on his prisoners, and after reassuring himself that they wouldn't get away from him, he began to talk again.

"There ain't nobody else in that sanctuary of yours, is there? Be warned, if I find you lied to me, you're a dead man. Or woman."

"No, there isn't," Alistair said. "The sanctuary was guarded by me, and when the Prism was taken, I alerted Mej. Nobody else should even know that the sanctuary exists."

His last comment felt very pointed.

"Listen, now. I do jobs. Your fault if you get in my way. Ain't no way I'm giving up on a job that fast, so you'd better warn whoever else wants to be in my way to stay out of it," Cash said. "Now, into the sanctuary."

They made it through the maze of corridors relatively easily, with only two occasions on which Alistair stopped to mess with hidden control panels, disabling traps that had lain in wait.

The sanctuary's structural layout was floating in the upper left corner of Cash's goggles. It beeped as they reached the door to the Prism room.

Alistair opened a new concealed control panel, tapping in a code and causing the door to slide open.

There, in the middle of the room, on its pillar, sat the Prism. Cash strode in and grabbed it off of the pillar, walking back to where the two captives waited.

"So, here's the deal. I've got a tracer somewhere on the property - standard procedure - and if I see any communications coming off of this place before I'm a good five light-years away, I'll blow the explosives I wired up. Got it? Good. Now. I'm going to lock you in this room, and leave the building. You're going to stay in here until this timer" - he slapped a small screen onto the wall, which lit up with a display of what was probably digits of a language not of Earth - "goes off. If you try to mess with the timer, or the doors, or anything, those explosives will go off. Clear?"

The two captives nodded.

"Good."

Cash left the room, shoving the two inside, and closed the door, firing a shot at the control panel and disabling it. The same digits on the timer flashed in the bottom left corner of his screen, beginning to count down.

Cash strode out through the halls of the sanctuary, the Prism safe in his backpack. He exited the structure and entered his ship, starting the engines.

As he flew off, the sanctuary receding into the distance, he looked at the readout of the timer, now on the dashboard.

To heck with it, he thought, and pressed the button to detonate the explosives. He sighed with happiness as the entire structure behind him blew up in a glorious blaze of fire.