

Chapter I – A surprise

The hover taxi stopped with a gentle hiss in front of an immense building, made from pristine white plates with accentuated wooden panels for decoration. In front of it, a sign reading “*Revel & York*” informed the visitor that this place was “Hangar Cluster 6”. A cluster, however, may have been a generous term, even for a place that hugged at steep cliffs, leading down to the ocean below. While the complex was immense – easily several kilometers long and equally tall, it seemed to only feature a few actual hangars. Each of these had a wallscreen set above the main entry doors, proclaiming the name of the owner.

The taxi’s door opened and the last words between driver and customer could be heard, as the passenger left the yellow-colored hover.

“I paid you what you said it’d cost me, when we started. Not a chit more!” were the last words, before Khain shot out from the taxi and slammed the door behind him. Disgruntled at the bad service, the anthropomorphic ferret strained his neck backwards against the impressive building. The push of air from under the taxi, as it lifted itself into the air, made the legs of his jeans flap against his lithe legs. With a last hiss and an annoying honk, no doubt aimed at Khain, the taxi was out of there.

“Sheez, why’d I take a taxi?” Khain muttered to himself, looking at the dust trail left by the hover. Sighing some, he tugged the collar of his leather jacket up against his neck and moved towards the luxurious building.

The glass doors of the entry hall slid open without a sound, though Khain’s arrival didn’t go unnoticed. A light *ding* could be heard in the lobby, and barely a moment after, a particularly neat-looking, squirrel lady appeared. Quite a lovely little thing, if she hadn’t been so buttoned up in a woman’s suit and a pencil-skirt. Khain wasn’t good with formalities or the niceties the finer citizenship, but it seemed he’d have to give it a try.

“Can I help you?” the squirrel asked, perhaps in a more reserved tone than she’d intended, the look of the more simple ferret apparently worrying her some.

“Yes, thanks.” Khain started, only to stop again as he wasn’t sure exactly how to word the next thing. The silence between them grew and erred on the edge of unpleasantness, before Khain got on with it.

“I have an appointment with Terril Pridemane? At.. Ehm..” he finally said, pulling out a crumbled piece of paper from his jacket’s pocket. Unfolding it, he read from it. *“Right! Hangar 3!”* he said excitedly, looking to the squirrel. At the final mention of his appointment, the lady seemed much more at ease, before looking to the Glas in her hand. Flicking her gentle finger across a few times, she then nodded.

“Ah yes, Mr. Wardancer. If you go through that hallway, you’ll reach the hangar. Buzz the door and I’m sure Mr. Pridemane will let you inside.” she explained, before moving back to her desk, hidden behind a glass wall with water running down the front of it, vastly obscuring her form.

Having been left with his instructions, Khain saw no other way forward, than to simply follow directions. At least there was a good thing from his time in the navy. Pulling awkwardly at the simple shirt under his jacket, he moved towards the hallway he’d been pointed to and started moving down it.

It didn’t take long to reach his destination. A golden-brown 3 on the wall made it quite obvious where he were and the following wallscreen underneath it, displayed his friend and former navy-mate’s name underneath. Sighing in relief that, hopefully, he’d be free of the lobbying, he quickly pressed the buzzer for the hangar. He could hear the summing sound on the inside of the, otherwise, steel-clad bulk doors. A

while passed, before the wallscreen with Terril's name shifted, showing the lion's face.

"Khain! There you are! Just a moment!" he exclaimed, before closing the feed. Left alone again, with no time to reply, Khain started humming slightly to himself, rocking back and forth on his heels. After another small eternity, a *beep* finally signaled that the doors were opening. Sliding open without any effort – or sound – the doors quickly revealed Terril on the other side, wearing his parade uniform from the navy. The lion was grinning widely as someone with a good secret would.

"There you are, Slinky!" the lion blurted moving forward and wrapping a strong arm around Khain's neck, giving the ferret a rough nookie under many protests of the smaller male. Mercy came only after Khain's hair had been thoroughly ruffled. Standing up, he had strands of hair sticking straight into the air. Gruntingly, he flattened it, while looking up at his friend.

"And here are you. Mind telling me what you've called me out here for?" Khain asked, quickly forgiving Terril for the introduction. It was nothing new and had almost become ceremony between the two. At his question, the smile on Terril's face only seemed to grow. He was practically giddy with excitement, more so than Khain had seen him in ages.

"I'm not gonna tell you. I'm gonna show you!" the lion said, before moving back into the hangar, motioning for Khain to follow. Sighing some at the secret shenanigans of the lion, Khain followed into the large, white hall, whistling lowly at the place. As he entered, the doors behind him slid closed and locked down, giving the two privacy.

"Is this it? A pompous hangar? For I will say... This place is impressive, but you don't own much else than a personal transporter." Khain said with a chuckle, noticing the rather exquisite details on the inside. Much like the building's exterior, the insides were equally white with mahogany finish. Added to the hangar, however, were details like wallscreens with information, a table in sheened oak and several planters with grasses. All in all, it was luxurious and sleekly designed. But Terril didn't seem to let himself stop at Khain's question, simply moving forward towards a turn.

"Of course it's not. All of this simply came along with the purchase." he explained, calmly, before turning on his heel and holding out an arm in the direction of the turn, around which Khain couldn't see.

"Purchase? Purchase of wha..." Khain started, hastily moving towards Terril to see what was so impressive on the other side. And as he turned at Terril's outstretched hand, the ferret stopped and simply stared.

"An RSI Constellation?!" Khain blurted in awe at what was presented to him. Standing in the middle of the hangar's main area was nothing less than a freighter-class, Roberts Space Industries manufactured merchant icon! An absolute flagship among merchants and freighters, the large spaceship promised - just by looks alone - quality, security and quite a bit of crew commodities. Or at least so the commercials promised. Khain wrested his eyes from the ship, back to Terril with clear disbelief in his eyes.

"How did you..." he started, before a sneaky grin grew unto his lips, shaking his head. *"Nah, I get it. It isn't yours. We've just been hired as crew, right?"* he asked. Terril, however, only countered with an equal grin.

"Oh, it's very much mine. And while I haven't let myself be hired as crew... I was hoping you would." he said, matter-of-factly. The large man slowly crossed his arms over his chest, leaving Khain quite speechless.

"You're kidding. How'd you ever afford that thing?" he asked in continued distrust. Terril just smirked, holding his pose, before shrugging ever so slightly.

"Pulled a few strings, had some savings. And you aren't the only one to have done some side-jobs after the navy." he explained. *"Are you in or out?"* he asked again.

It was a lot to take in. They'd both taken flying lessons, back in the navy and had both received

commemorations for their skills. But those had been dog-fighters and drones. What Terril was asking was for them to pilot, together, an 80 ton freighter with a potential 1100 freight units capacity. Not to mention that the crew for such a thing was set to 5 members with good reason. Still, they had talked before about making their own company once they'd earned their citizenship and start making some honest cash. And now Terril had the means and the measure. Slumping his shoulders and sighing deeply, Khain looked at Terril with a comically grumpy look.

"I'm not walking out of this, am I?" He asked, already knowing the answer.

"Nope, Slinky!"