

Carrivar Nights

Alexandre Morgan

32 ABY

The bridge of the ship was too cold. The gray steel of the floor felt as if chilled carbonite ran beneath it, sucking all the warmth from the room. It hampered Gar Pavan's concentration – it was harder to reach out to the Great Presence when your buttocks were ready to freeze off and wither.

He sat upright on the floor in front of the wide viewport, his eyes closed and brow crumpled in concentration. His hands rested on his knees, and his legs, one folded beneath the other, were slightly shivering, but he couldn't decide if it was because of the cold or because he finally had stilled his mind enough to begin to *feel* the Presence.

It was then as if his consciousness itself grew arms, pulling himself out of his own body and straight through the ship's viewport, out into the incomprehensible void. There, where his consciousness floated freely, unbound by mortal constraints, it found the Presence. Gar saw it as a gargantuan orb in space, pulsing purple and blue and white in time with the ebbs and flows of hyperspace. Even though he knew this orb was a manufacturing of his own inability to comprehend the sheer omnipotence of the Presence, the visualization served its function.

To him, the Chaos seemed to be inside him. It wasn't an external maze he navigated, not a set of stellar obstacles through which he wove his path. And it wasn't his job as a Pathfinder Navigator, but it was his *purpose* – for the Chaos was inside him. It was his internal being he drew the ship through, pulling the vessel through the part of him he estimated to be immortal in some impossible way. The Great Presence was without and it was within, and within it showed Gar its intentions.

To the officers on the bridge, it seemed like the ship suddenly decided to slip into hyperspace. No sudden jolting shuddering of the deck marked the dimension shift, no beeping of astrocomputers calculating anticipated the transition. The craft slid smoothly into the rotating tunnel of blue and white, reflected off the steel floor and mirrored in the open eyes of the crew. The hyperspace action lever had pushed itself forward, triggered by a remote that lay in one of Gar's hands,

He then stood up, but his eyes stayed closed. In a dream-like stupor, he slowly walked from his seat on the floor to the helmsman's station, where he gripped the controls with unfeeling hands. The bridge crew stood clear of his path.

Small twitches on Gar's face matched miniscule corrections on the helm, outward projections belying a sub-surface existence that was nothing short of miraculous. Directed by the Great Presence, Gar became one with the inner Chaos. He found inside himself the path through hyperspace, weaving between hazards innumerable and deathly that the Presence alerted him to. The orb was a maze, with a highlighted trail to follow.

The jump was only a few minutes long, the destination not but a sector away. With the pre-Pathfinder microjump methods, it would have been a day's worth of travel. The blue and white condensed to pinpricks out the now-stationary vessel, and Gar's azure eyes shot open. The orb and the connection were gone, the Presence having taken him where he needed to be.

"Ladies and gentlemen and all others," he announced with a bow, as was his habit, "the Carrivar System."

Stars and planets dotted the background of the empty void of space. In between them lay an ethereal soup, an expanse of nothingness where none go – except when you have to.

The four TIE Rhodium craft of Rho Flight III burst into realspace halfway in between two systems, their reentry a slam barely compensated for by the inertial dampers.

“Flight Three, check in.” Isabis Kamaria’s voice came over the comm system and through the pilot’s helmet’s speakers.

“Rho Ten, roger that, new boss lady.” Davy Jonez whipped his craft in line with Isabis’s.

“Rho Eleven, checking in.” Alexandre Morgan fell into the formation. His music he openly played in the cockpit slightly bled through his microphone

“Rho Twelve, present and accounted for.” Rotarg Kradak chuckled. “What a view, huh?” No planets, suns, or anything else was visible beyond the standard pinprick lightyears away. It was as if the four craft hung suspended in nothingness – without a reference point, no matter how fast one accelerated one might as well be frozen in space.

Isabis’s voice cut back in. “Only one microjump left, crew. Should be about five minutes. Heading dot four nine five.” The four craft wheeled in unison to face the right direction, and began to power back up their hyperdrives.

“Someone remind me why we have to do this whole microjump thing again?” Davy asked. Of course he knew, but it was a way to express the universal frustration with the process. Without the rumored Navigators, it was necessary. The Chaos wasn’t named *the Chaos* for its fields of flowers and warm sunlight – filled with astronomical hazards, ranging from black holes to rogue stars, no astrocomputer could safely plot through the unknown and variable, even the advanced ones aboard the Rhodium craft.

“Let’s just be the ones to find the Navigators,” Isabis said. “If it’s us, we won’t have to do this microjumping all the way back to the fleet – they’ll come to us on Carrivar.” The hyperdrives in the craft were now audible, whirring in the high pitch of building energy.

“On my mark, Flight Three,” she said, gripping the hyperdrive lever. “And... engage.” The four craft lept from view, their reflective silver exterior briefly a stark hyperspace blue.

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Carrivar was a blue and green world from orbit, a pre-industrial forest world with oceans and mountains, devoid of city lights when it was rotated away from its sun.

On the ground it became exceedingly clear that it wasn’t pre-industrial because of circumstance, but because of choice. It was a spiritual hub, home to religions and sects and cults of exceedingly high quantities. The Chaos was a breeding ground for diverse explanations, each with their own methodology and preferred story of how, of why, and of the future. But one of the things most of them agreed on was the high importance of natural beauty, so Carrivar stayed raw and stunning with its high peaks, low valleys, and verdant forests.

Rho Flight Three landed its craft in a clearing on the outskirts of the only city on Imperial record. Donning dark, hooded cloaks, Isabis, Davy, Morgan, and Rotarg left their ships and entered the night-covered city, following dirt paths between wooden buildings and gas lamp street lights that cast harsh shadows across the paths, hiding the faces of the four pilots even further.

“Any advice on where to go, boss lady?” Davy asked, walking down a main road, in a hushed tone of voice that somehow still carried through the night and light mist.

Isabis looked at Morgan. “Well, we’ve got a ranking Rear Admiral right beside us. Any great ideas, Morgan?”

He chuckled. “We both know I’m outranked here, Lieutenant Commander,” he said, his verbal stress on her rank. “Your unit, your lead.”

Rotarg politely cleared his throat, and all three turned to look at him. He pointed to his left, at one of the wooden buildings. Above the door, in various scripts, it read *Cantina*. Light softly emanated from slits in the closed windows, and, when the four pilots stood still and quiet, they could hear muffled music and conversation. “How about the one place where information only costs you a drink?” he chuckled.

Davy immediately started walking towards the door. “Drinks? Don’t have to convince me too hard.” The rest of the flight followed behind him, into the racket and light.

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The bar that Gar Pavan had chosen was far from the finest establishment on Carrivar, but it was the most cost-efficient. A little seedy hole-in-the-wall only a minute walk from the outskirts of the city, it was frequented by Navigators of all types and sects, so Gar felt right at home. He sat at the bar, nursing his favorite local drink, thinking about his future. He hadn’t already lined up a next job, and while it did slightly worry him, he knew the Great Presence would provide.

The bartop uniquely faced the entrance, a design quirk that he didn’t feel was entirely intentional. Nevertheless, it let him see the four hooded newcomers enter. Two of them looked somewhat comfortable, walking confidently towards the bar and tossing their cloaks further on their backs, revealing their faces, those of a human female and male Abednedo. They both headed directly to the bar, the woman sitting beside him and the Abednedo farther away across the bar. The other two hesitated by the door, both human males. One went and sat at an empty table, keeping his extraordinarily obscuring hood down, but the last stayed by the door. He looked around hesitantly.

The woman beside Gar chuckled, seeing the last man standing still. “Morgan,” she shouted out at him. “Get your ass over here!” In the loud racket of the bar, nobody besides Gar and Morgan probably heard her. He walked over and sat on the other side of the woman, who was still chuckling.

“Ain’t much your scene, is it, my distinguished Admiral Morgan?”

He glared at her. “Well, I know damn well that it is *your* scene, ma’am,” he said, a sarcastic emphasis on *ma’am* eliciting a chuckle from the female. Gar fancied himself socially aware, but this relationship evaded even his understanding.

“Let’s just focus on the Navigators,” the female said. “Find them, and we can get out of here.”

Gar was stunned. The Presence was providing a little quicker than he had anticipated. He turned to the two of them and caught their attention. “Excuse me, friends,” he said, “did you say Navigator?”

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Morgan could hardly believe their luck. They pick a random city, enter a random bar, sit down at random seats, and end up right next to a Navigator – the one thing they came to look for.

The man introduced himself as Gar Pavan. “I’m a Pathfinder Navigator,” he said. “Are you looking to hire?”

Isabis nodded. “Tell us about yourselves, if you don’t mind.”

Gar shrugged, only slightly taken aback. “Alright,” he said. It wasn’t a strange request, just oddly timed, and with a weirdly plural pronoun, which he amounted to Basic not being her first language. “My name is Gar Pavan. I’m a human from Lioaoian space –”

Here he was interrupted by Isabis. “No, I mean the Navigators, the Pathfinders, whatever you called them. What do you do?”

Gar was again slightly put off guard. *These four must be from far away*, he thought, *because nobody here would not know*. “We are one with the Great Presence. We navigate the hyperdimension where astrocomputers cannot, and safely weave our way through the Chaos.”

“Alright,” Isabis nodded. “If you want all the money you can conceive, come with us. You won’t have to get drinks from a bar like this when you’re done with us – you can own your own cantina on Bespin.” She rose from her seat, placing a few shiny credit chips down with an attention-drawing metallic clink next to her untouched drink. Morgan followed her, shooting an awkward smile as encouragement or something to Gar before slipping his hood back over his face and walking behind Isabis and the other two, who had already gathered. Together they walked out, the light from the open door briefly illuminating a section of the enshrouded street outside.

Gar had encountered a lot of weird organisms in his career, with odd looks, mannerisms, and customs, but this interaction took the cake. Frowning, he picked up her credits, closing his eyes and sighing when he saw the Imperial cog emblazoned on the bottom of the chip.

He chuckled. *That explains the awkward behavior of half of them*, he thought. *Not used to a cantina not made of steel*. Sighing again, he heaved himself off his bar seat and walked out the door, where the four stood waiting for him already.

“You’ve got money?” he said. “Then you’ve got a Navigator.”

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