

## Chapter VII - Heraclark

### Planet Loogmor

Heraclark Scotnyx lazily swiped his hand in the air. The holographic display in midair shifted from the action flick he had been watching to the CCTV footage of the various parts of the Bank of Loogmor. It was the same as usual — wealthy clients garbed in the finest of attires, standing at the tellers' desks, waiting on the couches in the lobby, or being escorted to the retrieval room in the basement. Every time Heraclark did that, he felt like a mere security guard, except that he was not — he was the manager at BOL, sitting in his small yet cozy office at the back of the bank.

His office was comfortably warm, so the full sleeves of his powder-blue dress shirt were rolled up. Over it was a navy sweater vest in a diamond pattern. His dress pants were chestnut with purple-taupe loafers.

Everything is wretchedly dull as usual, thought Heraclark. Satisfied, he swiped his hand again, and the action flick resumed, featuring the beautiful and lithe Pinz Ailoraw from planet Felitty.

No sooner had Pinz fired a shot than Dusknell came bursting into the office so that it seemed she had actually shot him. "Heraclark, you won't believe what just—" He paused, frowning back and forth at Heraclark and the space above his desk. "It's so painfully obvious you're watching a movie again, Heraclark."

Dusknell, his assistant manager, had raven-black hair parted in the middle and olive eyes that always seemed to be analyzing something.

I'm not really trying to hide it anyway, Heraclark thought to himself. He removed the headset that enabled him to visualize the display and placed it on his desk.

"Anyway, scratch that," Dusknell carried on before Heraclark could answer. "As I was saying, something unbelievable just happened. A client just came in to make a withdrawal from none other than that account!"

Heraclark sat up straight in his chair and removed his legs from the top of the desk. "You don't mean that account?" he asked in disbelief.

"Oh, I so mean that account!" Dusknell said, excited like a kid.

The account in question had been opened long before Heraclark was employed at the bank. As of now, it had remained dormant for over twenty years. The Bank of Loogmor was distinguished in that it ensured complete anonymity of its clients who were only given a unique key as identification. Therefore, no one knew who the owner of the account really was.

"Have they completed the application for claiming it back?" Heraclark asked.

The contents of accounts remaining dormant for more than five years were turned over to the planetary treasury and had to be claimed back. Whatever was in the account had probably been not worth it and had not been moved from the bank's vaults. Still, it was the Loogmort government's property, and bank employees were restricted from accessing it.

"Yes, he did," Dusknell replied as he handed some papers to Heraclark. "You're authorized to hand over the contents to him."

Heraclark studied the papers meticulously, which looked legitimate enough. Casting them aside, he got up and briskly moved toward the door. He really wanted to see who had turned up after all this time and what useless garbage the bank had been holding for them.

As he alighted onto the walkway outside his office overlooking the lobby, a cold draft of air greeted him, and Dusknell fell in beside him. Heraclark had a much better view from this vantage point than all the surveillance cameras combined. He could even see the sneaky Skygga at her desk in the distance, discreetly accepting something from a client when she thought no one was looking.

The walls of the lobby rose three-hundred feet to an arched roof with ribbed vaults. It was longer than it was wide, with thick, marble columns set in two rows. The bank looked like a castle — in fact, in its inception, a couple of centuries ago, it had actually been a castle with its tall towers and spires, flying buttresses, and its utter emphasis on verticality. The atmosphere was cold, dark, and gloomy due to the lack of large enough windows, but Loogmorts liked it that way.

After descending a few couples of steps, Heraclark and Dusknell turned toward their right, heading for the elevators in the back of the bank.

"The client is already waiting outside the retrieval system," Dusknell explained.

"Does he look like he owns the key?" Heraclark asked, very well aware that he could be the judge of that in a minute, but he still could not resist.

"Hmm... I don't know," Dusknell said, frowning. "He's alright, I guess, as far as our clients go. All professional-like and discreet...seems like a business tycoon if you ask me."

I did ask you, Heraclark mused to himself. He always left it to Dusknell to discern their clients' actual backgrounds. He wished he could get to talk to this client, but the Bank of Loogmor just strictly provided services, no questions asked.

Once they reached the elevators, Heraclark checked himself in the reflection gazing back at him with deep-blue eyes and an oblong, firm yet pale face. He gently patted the lax spikes in his thick, blue-black hair. Then they entered and started their descent toward the basement. Moments later, they stepped out into a spacious, vaulted hallway branching off

at intervals. At the far end was a thick, metal sliding door labeled 'retrieval.' The air in the basement was warmer and carried a musty odor.

As Heraclark advanced toward the door, he fixated his eyes on the tall figure lingering outside, alongside a security guard. The client was a sharply dressed man with slicked-back hair and gentle, brown eyes. His hands were gathered behind his back, and his lips were pursed as he quietly inspected the marble floor and vaulted ceiling in the basement.

The client turned his attention toward Heraclark as he approached, giving a slight courteous smile.

"Good evening," Heraclark said, offering his hand. The nights were so long on planet Loogmor that this was by far the most common greeting here. "I'm Heraclark Scotnyx, manager at the Bank of Loogmor."

"Pleasure to meet you," the client said with a curt nod as he shook Heraclark's hand.

"Could I see your key, please?" Heraclark asked, trying his best formal accent.

"Sure," replied the client. He dug into the inner pocket of his tuxedo, brought out a gleaming, golden key, and handed it to Heraclark.

Heraclark turned it in his hand to examine all of its characteristic markings. The key was merely for identification and was not supposed to fit in any lock at all. It carried the insignia of the Bank of Loogmor — a black raven in a cage. Underneath, it was embossed with the account number — the same one that had kept the employees at BOL perplexed all these years. Heraclark was not sure if he felt excited or relieved upon finally seeing the number on a key.

"Thank you," Heraclark said, handing the key back. "Please follow me."

Heraclark proceeded toward the sliding door. Mounted next to it on the wall was an electronic sensor on which Heraclark placed his hand. The sensor beeped, and an orange light above it turned on. Next, Heraclark moved aside to make way for Dusknell, who put his hand in turn.

The light turned green, and the door slid open.

"This way," Heraclark beckoned, gesturing with his hand.

He entered the room beyond, followed by the client, while Dusknell remained outside with the security guard. The door slid close behind them. An identical sensor was mounted beside the door in here as well. However, now that Heraclark and Dusknell were on opposite sides of the door, it only required one of them to open the door, and the light above the sensor was already orange.

The retrieval room gave a bizarre mix of appearances, half high-tech workshop in a factory, and half exquisitely furnished living room. The three walls without the door bore several rectangular openings through which emerged conveyor belts arcing gracefully to converge at a station in the middle of the room. The area closest to and on either side of the door was furnished with luxurious, mahogany sofas encased in supple, brown leather, and two coffee tables in their midst. The entire floor was covered in a fine, velvety carpet.

"Please enter your password," Heraclark said, ushering the client toward the station. "The contents of your locker will arrive shortly. You may take as much time as you want." Actually, just hurry the heck up, Heraclark urged in his head.

The client silently moved to the station on the side of which was built a console. It was obscured from Heraclark's view as the client stood over it. Heraclark heard a few beeps as the client entered his password into the keypad.

Immediately, the second conveyor belt from the right rumbled to life and started moving. Moment of truth, thought Heraclark. He shuffled his feet as he waited for the safe deposit box to arrive. The client, on the other hand, never even moved a muscle but stood quietly.

"Dark bane," Heraclark suddenly heard the client faintly whisper. Or was it 'dark pain' he said?

In a second, Heraclark saw a dark-orchid flash of light emanating from somewhere in front of the client. He is using a virtual backpack, Heraclark realized, his heart racing.

The client spun around, and all Heraclark could see at that moment was a muzzle aimed at his head. He ducked for his life as a smoky, purple orb shot out from the muzzle. It struck the door behind Heraclark, staining it the same color for a brief moment.

Seeing an opening, Heraclark lunged upward at the client and rammed hard into his chest. The client's legs were shoved against the station while his torso was flung across the top of the station with Heraclark pinning him down. As the client struggled to point his purple and red gun at Heraclark, the latter released a wispy, dark-orchid tendril from his left hand — it slithered around the client's wielding hand like a ghostly snake and freed the gun from his grasp.

Heraclark retracted his tendril and pointed the gun right at the client's face. "Who the heck are you, you lowlife scum?!" he seethed.

In a flash, the gun disappeared from Heraclark's hand. Bewildered, Heraclark glanced at the client's right hand, which was in his tuxedo pocket. Stupid VBP again! A hard blow to Heraclark's right cheek from a glowing, scarlet fist caught him unawares, loosening his grip on the client, who proceeded to shove Heraclark off himself.

"Dark Pain!" the client roared as he straightened. His gun returned to his hand in a flash of light. As he raised it to aim at Heraclark, the door slid open, and the security guard came rushing in, followed by Dusknell.

"Drop it, you fool!" the security guard yelled, pointing his machine gun at the client.

The client gritted his teeth, glowering back and forth at Heraclark and the guard. Over his shoulder, Heraclark watched as the conveyor belt carried a black safe deposit box into the room. The belt stopped moving once the object reached its end.

Just as Heraclark was contemplating marching over to the box with the gun still aimed at him, the security guard shot several purple bolts of energy into the client's shoulder. The weapon dropped from the latter's hand as he yelped in pain and covered his shoulder with his other hand. He crouched on the floor while dark-orchid enertrons began leaking out of his wound — the particles that were his power source as well as his very life force.

"How did he get a gun inside?" Dusknell asked, apparently no one in particular.

"He's carrying a darned VBP!" said Heraclark, angrily. The device had been invented some four or five years ago and was still such a rarity that security systems everywhere were seldom adequately equipped to detect it.

Heraclark stooped to grab the client by the hair and yanked his face toward himself. "We will call the ambulance — but not before you tell me who you are and what the meaning of this madness was."

"I don't know," the client groaned.

"You don't know who you are?!"

"I don't know why I was told to kill you. All I know is that you weren't supposed to see what's in that box."

"Well, then I darn well should see it, shouldn't I?" Heraclark said, shoving the client's head to the floor. He moved to the safe deposit box sitting on the conveyor belt.

Grabbing it from both sides, Heraclark unclasped the lid. He then lifted the lid and placed it next to the box. He peered inside to find a little white envelope. He scooped it up and turned around to see it in the light. Nothing was written on it, but something rattled inside.

"What is it?" Dusknell asked, already analyzing the envelope from afar. The security guard was bent over the client, who was so pale by now, he looked like he could die any minute.

"An envelope," Heraclark replied thoughtlessly.

Heraclark opened the envelope, pulled out a small booklet, and leafed to the first page. A name was written there in bold letters. As Heraclark looked at it, his world was sent spinning.

He did not know how long he had been staring at the thing when a tendril snatched it from his hands. He looked up reflexively to find the tendril retracting back into Dusknell's hand along with the envelope.

"Sir, I don't know how much longer this one's going to hold out," the security guard intoned, anxiously bent over the client.

"Call an ambulance — and the police," Dusknell said, placing his hand on the sensor. He turned to Heraclark, who then did the same.

"Yes, sir." The security guard took out his holophone and went out of the room as the door slid open.

Meanwhile, Dusknell studied the first page of the booklet. "Alcidiff Scotnyx," he said, then looked up worriedly at Heraclark. "Your father?"



Heraclark barely managed a nod. He once again went over to the client to seize his hair. "Who sent you?" he growled. "Give me a name, or I swear I'll make sure you never make it to the hospital."

"Are you really that thick?" the client croaked. "You need me alive."

"But if you're not going to give me a name, I have no use for you, do I?"

"When I make it safely to prison, you will get it. I botched this job. The people I work for — they are not going to let me go that easily."

Overcome by rage, Heraclark punched the client in the face with a crackling, scarlet fist so hard that the blow sent the client sprawling over the floor, unconscious.

"Heraclark, no!" Dusknell bellowed in horror.

Heraclark proceeded to fish through the pockets of the client's tuxedo and brought out a holophone. He dialed the last number in the call log. A couple of rings later, a queerly familiar voice answered. "Umberton here. You got it? I'm waiting on Karomoz."

This time Heraclark's world stopped altogether as a flurry of emotions swept over him.

"You there?" the voice asked again.

"Yes. I'm coming," Heraclark replied curtly, doing his best impression of the client, and ended the call.

"Who was it?" Dusknell asked.

"Grelig Umberton," Heraclark replied, squeezing the phone in his hand. "The man who murdered my father all those years ago."

Do give me your feedback about this chapter, and if you enjoyed it, please consider dropping a vote. Have a great day!