A shrill chime sounded from the facility’s amplifiers as the bottom left screen flashed bright red – once, twice, three times to indicate the area in which the motion sensor had been tripped. Four pairs of eyes instantly fixed themselves on the figure gliding left to right across the display. Despite the bright red surface of the planet, the black cloak seemed to blend into the background with an eerie amount of ease. The person beneath the draping garment strode effortlessly across the desert in a trajectory that pointed straight at the rear entrance of the complex. Though Raaj couldn’t make out an exact outline of the body contained within the cloak, there was something about the way it carried itself – the upright and unwavering posture, the precise swing of the arms, the heaviness in the strides that carried it closer and closer to the facility – that seemed calculated and powerful.

And even before the hood was unsheathed to reveal a shaven head sitting atop a pair of frosty grey eyes and sharp features, Raaj knew – this was a dangerous man. As the man closed the distance between him and facility, his head swiveled to face the hidden surveillance camera, eyes piercing straight through the digital display into the now-silent control room.

It was Mahk’ra who finally spoke.

“If he is who I think he is, we may not get out of here alive.” Brutally honest, as always.

“Care to explain a little?” Raaj struggled to keep the composure in his voice.

Mahk’ra eyes flickered to the adjacent screen, where the figure was making his way through a hall in the fourth underground level.

“Years ago, before the interplanetary reform of the Sha’Kaar system, the Mestah held a particularly barbaric tradition.

Once a year, the entire collection of the planet’s death row prisoners was gathered in a colossal arena for the Gorscht – a massive fight to the death using nothing but their bare hands.

It was an event that took days.

Their original intent, their supposed justification for this brutality, was that they were attempting to assemble a team of unrivaled warriors – a specialized task force that would carry out its deeds in deadly secrecy across the galaxy. The Gorscht was an extreme way to the find the strongest and deadliest person out of a collection of strong and deadly people.

The problem was, of course, that winners of the Gorscht always ended up with some kind of irreparable physical injury, or worse, were psychologically broken to the point that they had essentially lost all functionality for the rest of their lives. So with time, the Gorscht became a tradition for its own sake, a sick form of entertainment that drew bloodthirsty crowds and represented the absolute worst of human nature.

At least, this was true until a man known as Karfact competed one year. Some say he deliberately placed himself in incarceration.

Not only did he win, but he was the first and only contender to ever emerge unscathed, and thus is the sole member of the Mestah Special Forces.”

The man was now making his way across the fifth screen from the left. Two levels beneath Raaj and his team.

“And I assure you, his sole purpose for setting foot on this rock is to hunt us down.”