

Seventy-Eight

By Dave Littley

When Jacamar got through the explosives scanner and entered the bar, there was a hush as everyone took in the behemoth. He was large for a Gra-Luruk, almost eleven hundred kilograms, most of it muscle. His fur bristled as he felt everybody's gaze, and he took a moment to glare at a couple of nearby Yarks, making sure that his twin pistols were visible.

"Hey Jac!" a voice called from near the bar. Jac looked towards the voice and saw an equally impressive Gra-Luruk waving him over. He smiled and wandered over. Many of the patrons of the bar relaxed as it seemed that the 'Luruk wasn't there to kill anyone.

"Hey Gor, how's it hangin'?" Jac said as he sat at the other 'Luruk's table.

"Great. Where the hell have you been? I haven't seen you in almost a month." Gormanov waved over a waitress and ordered a couple of Kronian Ales.

"Long story. Actually I can't stay long, I've booked passage on a freighter out of the system."

"You're shitten me. Where you going?"

"Don't much care, just don't want to stay here."

"You're not worried about the stupid gangs killing each other off are you? You could kick most of their asses blindfolded, you know that."

"It's not the gangs I'm worried about." The drinks came and Jac chugged his back and ordered another. He glanced at his friend, who was looking quizzically at him.

"So, are you going to tell me about it, or are we just going to get drunk?"

"Trust me, you're better off not knowing." The waitress brought another drink for Jac and he again chugged it back.

"So, to drunken oblivion it is!"

"Sorry." A sly smile came across Jac's burly visage. "I really only came to humiliate you one last time."

Gor met Jac's gaze with a smile of his own. "I seem to remember, the last time it was you that was humiliated."

"Well, then I guess we'll just have to see." Jac moved the empty mugs from the table and placed his elbow on the table, his hand raised towards Gor in challenge. Gor did likewise and grasped the other's hand.

"One condition. If I win, you tell me what made you decide to bail."

Jacamar thought for a few moments, staring intently at his friend. "All right."

Again a hush went over the bar. The regulars at the bar had seen this before, but were always amazed at the raw power being exerted. Each of Jacamar's and Gormanov's arms massed more than the average being in the room. As the arms started to exert against each other, the table started to shake. Fortunately, the structure of this particular table had long been reinforced by the establishment.

At first it looked as if Jacamar was going to win. The look of concentration on his face spoke of weeks of stress that needed burning off. But as the clasped arms were about forty degrees towards a victory by Jacamar, Gormanov seemed to get a second wind. The arms rose back to the vertical and started in the other direction.

"C'mon Jac, you can do better than this." Gor muttered between grunts of exertion. There was a moment where Jacamar's temper flared, slowing his arms decent, but soon after it was over, his arm pushed down.

"Ha! Now who's humiliated?"

Jacamar smiled briefly and waved over the waitress. "I think I need another drink." A few minutes went by where Jacamar sat quietly, ordering more drinks and getting thoroughly drunk.

"So?" Gormanov finally said, breaking the silence.

"So what?"

"Why you bailing? C'mon, now. I won the challenge. Spill it."

Jacamar again stared intently at his friend. He looked to start speaking a couple of times, but stopped, unsure of where to begin.

"Do you remember what started the gang wars about a month ago?" he finally asked.

"Yeah, I think they were meeting to discuss territory or something like that. There were some high ranking Mafia guys involved, Kvankii's I think. Anyway, one side set up an ambush, most everyone was killed, and now we have a minor gang war."

"Neither side set up the ambush. Someone else did. I was nearby when the battle took place. I was headed home when I heard the weapons fire. I went to check it out but it quickly ended. As I got closer, I saw a bunch of bodies being piled together."

Gormanov took a few moments to digest that information.

"Who was doing the piling?"

"They were wearing cloaks so at first I couldn't tell. There were five of them. One of them looked quite wounded as one arm was hanging limply and another of the guys was working on him with a tool kit."

"Tool kit? So they were droids?"

"They were droids." Jacamar ordered another drink and chugged it back before continuing.

“I was about to sulk away, not wanting to get involved when one of the droids looked right at me. Now, I had snuck up on the scene and was fairly well hidden as far as I could tell. But this guy just turned around and stared right at me. That’s when I saw the eyes.”

“What’s so special about a droid’s eyes?”

“They were glowing green.”

“So?”

“You idiot! Haven’t you ever heard of a Darkken Droid before?” Jacamar caught himself and glanced around the bar. Most had looked up at his outburst, but quickly went back to their business.

Gormanov looked intently at Jacamar. “It was a Darkken Droid? But there’s no Darkken Droids here. There hasn’t been a sighting in ages.” Gormanov felt a chill run up his spine as he thought of the implications.

“It gets worse.”

“How could it get any worse?”

“I killed them.”

There was silence at the table as the two giants stared at each other. The waitress brought a couple more drinks. When Gormanov spoke again, he was talking in a very low voice.

“You killed five Darkken Droids?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“You remember me telling you that I used to belong to NastiDyne security?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, at one point we had to study the old Confederation files on Darkken Droids. I learned two very important things. First, if you see a Darkken Droid, the odds of your survival are very low. Second, when a Darkken Droid dies, they explode. Darkken Droids are rarely together in case one them is killed and hurts the others. And here I was facing five of them all together.”

“So what happened.”

“I pulled out my pistols just as they all pulled out their weapons. Fortunately I was a touch quicker.”

Jacamar absent-mindedly ran his hand along the hilt of one of his pistols. Originally they were standard NST 429 pistols, but Jacamar had spent a considerable amount of money to upgrade them for increased power. Used with Jacamar’s skill, these weapons were devastating.

“You had five Darkken Droids pulling guns on you?” Gormanov’s eyes were wide, his mouth was hanging open and he failed to notice the tiny Gilth that just lifted his medical kit and scurried away.

“Yeah. And of course I’m thinking ‘I’m toast’. But, I was armed so I was going to go down fighting.”

More drinks came to the table and Jacamar paused in his story, much to the angst of Gormanov.

“Anyway, I took aim at the wounded one. It saw I was aiming at him and took a leap to the side. But I got him anyway, right in the head. And then, as he was flying backwards, I shot him again. And then a third time, right in the head.”

“Nice”

“Yeah. Just before it exploded I could see that there wasn’t much left of its head.”

“It exploded?”

“Yeah, remember I told you, when they die they explode. It saved my life.”

“How come?”

“Well because his four friends were all standing too close. The blast threw them all forward and killed the one that had been working on the wounded one. It exploded too, causing more damage to the other three. I caught a little bit of shrapnel, but nothing serious.”

“The other three survived?”

“Barely. They were all knocked flat by the explosions. Two of them started to get up and the other just raised his weapon and shot at me. I think its legs were busted. I just barely managed to duck down and felt the heat of the blast above my head. I shot back. He managed to roll a little so I only caught his shoulder, but with all the damage he had sustained from the explosions, it was enough to incapacitate him briefly. I shot him again, this time in the head. Guess what happened next?”

“He exploded?”

“Yup. Kaboom! It was great. And the other two were still in range of the explosion. They were tossed against a nearby wall and slumped to the ground. I shot the closest one and he exploded, causing the final one to blow up too. I couldn’t believe it.”

“I’m having trouble believing it myself.”

Jacamar noted the look of skepticism on his friends face.

“Look buddy, I wouldn’t make this shit up.”

“So let me get this straight. You killed five Darkken Droids, and you barely got a scratch on you.”

“Look I don’t care if you believe me or not. Let’s just have another drink.”

Jacamar and Gormanov ordered more drinks but didn't talk much. Eventually Gormanov stood up.

"Sorry buddy, got to go. I've got a date in about an hour. Wouldn't want to be late."

"Good luck."

"You too. Don't piss off any more Darkken Droids." Gor chuckled as he headed out of the bar.

"Moron" Jacamar muttered as he ordered a couple more drinks. He spent the next hour in the bar brooding. His flight wasn't scheduled to leave for another four hours and it only took about twenty minutes to get to the space port. So, he was left with nothing to do but drink.

At one point in his drunken stupor, Jac felt like he passed out. When he awoke, he suddenly realized that he was in a different bar. And even stranger, he didn't feel drunk anymore. He looked around his surroundings, but didn't recognize anything. He was about to get up when he noticed the Gilth sitting cross-legged on top of his table. It was such a preposterous situation that at first his brain couldn't fathom it. Gilths were such tiny stupid beings, barely sentient in the opinion of a lot of species. In some bars that Jacamar had frequented, they were served as appetizers.

Jacamar leaned down towards the tiny Gilth sitting on his table and growled. The Gilth just smiled up at him, seeming not to care that he was seconds away from being eaten.

"Hello Jacamar." the Gilth calmly said.

Jacamar stared at the Gilth for a few moments. He glanced around the bar again, not liking the situation he was in.

"Now how the hell did you know..." he trailed off and broke out into a sweat. He had been glancing around the bar when his eyes fell upon a figure sitting in the corner, covered up in a cloak and hood. He was about to continue scanning the room when he saw two glowing green eyes appear from within the hood. They were staring at him.

"Shit." Jacamar went to stand up when he realized in horror that his legs wouldn't move.

"Having trouble?" The Gilth asked.

Jacamar glowered down at the Gilth again. The Gilth smiled and then looked over his shoulder at the Darkken Droid Jacamar saw. He looked at Jacamar again and then turned in a different direction and stared. Jacamar followed his gaze and saw another hooded figure with two green lights staring at him. The Gilth then looked in a different direction, and Jacamar saw another set of eyes. This happened another twelve times before the Gilth looked back towards Jacamar.

"Are you understanding the situation you are in?"

Jacamar's mouth was dry and he looked around for possible sources of help. There were a couple of Reptiloids at a table nearby. A group of Humans a little further away. His mind also went through possible means of escape, but they all involved him having working legs.

“You’ll find that if you try to call out or say anything other than to order a drink, you’re voice will stop working.”

“Who the hell are you anyway? Why would a Gilth be helping... them?”

“Oh, the Gilth wasn’t a willing participant, but their minds are so easy to control.”

Jacamar stared at the Gilth. Gilths usually had a crazed hungry look about them, but this one was still just sitting calmly on top of the table.

“How are you controlling him?”

The Gilth raised an eyebrow. “You are aware that we have mentally based abilities, aren’t you?”

“Well, I knew you had some kind of telepathy, but I thought it was just a really sophisticated communication system.” Jacamar felt weird talking to the Gilth, knowing that he was actually talking to a Darkken Droid.

“Actually, we are quite adept mentalists. How do you think we disabled your legs? How do you think we brought you to this bar? Are you aware of how long ago you were at that other bar with Gormanov?”

Jacamar startled a little at mention of his friends name. He then pulled out his communicator, which had a chronometer on it.

“Three days? What the hell have I been doing?”

“Lying in the back of our shuttle for the most part. You see, we needed the time to completely examine your memories.”

Jacamar could feel his dread increasing.

“Why would you be interested in my memories?” he asked with trepidation.

“You’ll see. It’s time to get down to business. I need you pick a number between one and seventy eight.”

“Huh?”

“Pick a number between one and seventy eight. You do know how to count? I’m aware that your species isn’t the most intelligent.”

“Yes, I can count. I just don’t understand why.”

“You will. Now choose.” A blast of pain suddenly erupted within Jacamar’s skull. He clenched his teeth and let out a low grunt. “We can make you feel significantly more pain if you don’t do what we say.”

“Fine. Sixty. What the hell do you want it for anyway?”

“You’ll see. This may take a few minutes. You may want to order a drink.”

Jacamar sat there sullenly, casting glances at all the pairs of glowing green eyes staring back at him. He was amazed that no one else seemed to notice the dark intruders. People seemed to be ignoring him as well, which was also confusing. It wasn't often you see an oversized Gra-Luruk chatting with a twenty kilogram Gilth.

"Here we go." The Gilth finally said.

Jacamar looked back to the Gilth who just stood there staring at him.

"Excuse me?" Then he saw something else. He saw images in front of him that didn't match what he thought his eyes should be seeing. It was almost like an image was superimposed over his own vision.

"What's going on."

"You're seeing what one of our brothers is currently seeing. We are transferring the images directly to your mind. Here, close your eyes and you'll be able to see it more clearly." Jacamar felt his eyes close against his will. He couldn't open them again. He was, however, able to see the other images more clearly.

It appeared as if he were in a warehouse. He could see four other Darkken Droids dragging a clear plastic tank about a meter in width and height, and a meter and a half in length. Once it was in the center of the room, two of the droids left. One of the others lifted the lid while the other brought out a hose and filled the tank with water.

"What are they doing?" Jacamar asked.

"You'll see." The Gilth replied.

Eventually the other two droids returned carrying a body. It was a Reglactin, long black hair in the back, yellowish skin, flaring nostrils. He was muscular, but only about eighty kilograms, tiny by 'Luruk standards. The Darkken Droids placed the limp form on the lid of the box and bound him to it with some leather straps affixed to the lid. The Reglactin was taller than the lid, so only from his head to his upper thighs were resting on it.

One of the Darkken Droids activated a force beam generator that had been sitting nearby. He used it to raise the lid of the tank, Reglactin and all, into the air. It was positioned so that the Reglactin was floating vertically at the edge of the water filled tank.

Once the Reglactin was suspended into the air, Jacamar got a good look at his face.

"Piranga? What the hell do you want with Piranga?"

The Gilth remained silent. In Jacamar's vision, he saw one of the droids inject something into Piranga. Shortly he woke up and surveyed his surroundings. Jacamar could see him struggle against his bonds, and then freeze as he noticed the five Darkken Droids.

"Um, what's going on?" the Reglactin asked. He was starting to sweat and was now looking nervously at the tank of water beneath them.

“Y’know, Piranga’s afraid of water.” Jacamar muttered, knowing that nothing he said would make any difference.

“Most Reglactin’s are. Not being able to hold your breath does that to you.” The Gilth replied.

“Why are you doing this?”

“It is part of your punishment.”

“Are you going to kill him?”

“Eventually.”

The Darkken Droids in Jacamar’s vision set up four more force beams, which grabbed Piranga’s arms and legs. Piranga winced a little as his limbs were all spread as wide as they would go.

“But why Piranga?” Jacamar then felt a feeling of fear wash over him as he realized something poignant. The Gilth has asked him to pick a number between one and seventy-eight. Piranga was number sixty.

“No. You can’t be serious.” He bellowed. He started to try again to get up, but his legs would still not work. He then raised an arm and tried to swing at where he thought the Gilth was. But just as he started the swing, his arm stopped working and it fell to his side.

“Now, now, let’s not get too upset yet. As you may have guessed, your former coworker is going to be drowned in that tank of water. However, you may have noticed that the way things are currently, he isn’t going to fit.

Jacamar felt a sense of vertigo as the Darkken Droid who’s eyes he was looking through stood up and walked towards Piranga. The other droids walked out of his field of view. He started to hear a eerie low chant in his mind: “Kill... Kill... Kill...” Piranga jumped a little as the chanting started, obviously hearing it as well.

The Darkken Droid raised his arm and Jacamar could see that it was holding a large rifle. With this seeing through the droids eyes perspective, it seemed as if Jacamar himself was aiming at the Reglactin.

“Don’t!” Piranga screamed as he saw the weapon. The droid pulled the trigger and a bright beam of light shot out and impacted the Reglactin’s left bicep. More screaming followed as the droid moved the beam up and down the arm until it was burned completely through. The force beam holding Piranga’s left wrist yanked the severed arm away.

“Stop it!” Jacamar yelled. But soon after the beam struck out again, this time severing Piranga’s right arm. Little blood flowed as the laser cauterized the wounds as it caused them.

“Look. I’m the one who killed those damn droids. Why aren’t you killing me instead of him?”

“We have other plans for you.” Again the beam shot out and soon after, Piranga’s right leg fell to the ground. Shortly after, the left leg fell. After a few minutes, Piranga stopped screaming. He just stared in shock down at the stumps where his limbs used to be.

“Well, I think it would be best if he didn’t see what is going to happen next.” The Gilth said. Jacamar felt numb. One of the Darkken Droids came into view again. He went up to Piranga, still staring down at his mutilated body. The droid produced a knife and drove it into Piranga’s right eye. He screamed again, thrusting his head from side to side as blood started streaming out. The droid grabbed Piranga’s head to hold it still and drove the knife into his remaining eye. Copious amounts of blood streamed onto Piranga’s screaming face from the punctured eyeballs.

The Darkken Droid which had taken Piranga’s sight walked over to the force beam generator which was holding the Reglactin up. The lid to which Piranga was bound slowly oriented itself to the horizontal. It floated about a meter above the water filled tank.

“Care to say goodbye?” the Gilth asked. Jacamar remained silent. The lid fell down to the tank, immersing Piranga in water. The Reglactin struggled violently for a few seconds as the water filled his lungs but soon it was over. His head and the remains of his limbs hung down limply.

The vision ended and Jacamar felt his eyes open. The Gilth was still sitting cross legged at the table, smiling up at him.

“Now, down to business.”

“Bastards.”

“It’s hard to be a bastard when you don’t have a mother. Now as you may have guessed, during the last three days we have been scanning your memory. We have chosen seventy-eight people out of your life. They are your friends, family, and comrades; anyone you have ever cared about or admired. You were quite fond of Piranga for example. You worked with him in NastiDyne security for over three years, and developed quite a friendship with him. He was number sixty.”

“All of these seventy eight people currently have one or more of our brethren nearby. Unless you do exactly what we say, you will witness them all suffer an extraordinarily painful death.”

“Wouldn’t it be more effective to just torture me? Seems like you’re putting a lot of effort into this.”

“While scanning your memory, it was determined that you can withstand much personal suffering. However, you seemed to have retained a compassion that has been lost on so many combatants of your caliber. This seemed most effective, both as a punishment and as means of motivation.”

Jacamar sighed in defeat. He glanced around at all the green eyes still staring him down. “What do you want me to do.”

The Gilth turned and looked towards one of the bar’s private rooms. It was guarded by a couple of impressively large Vega-Lizards. Dark green, tall, a maw filled with shark-like teeth, the lizards were still dwarfed by Jacamar.

“While you were viewing Piranga’s death, five beings arrived, the two Vega-Lizards you see, a Human, a Mavvice, and a Chork. The other three went inside to meet with two Kvankii-Lood droids that have been there most of the day. You are going to incapacitate the Vega-Lizards, get into the private room and destroy the two Kvankii-Loods. You may engage the three other beings if you need to, but you must not kill them.

The droids must be completely destroyed, no possibility of revival. Once the droids are dead, leave this bar and meet us outside the bar you were originally at with Gormanov.”

Jacamar stared in disbelief. “That’s nuts! If I kill two Kvankii-Loods, they’ll be hunting me for the rest of my life.”

The Gilth’s smile became slightly larger. “Hesitating is punishable. Pick a number between one and seventy-eight.”

“Now wait a second. I was just…”

“Pick a number. Or we’ll pick five.”

Jacamar’s temperature rose a few degrees as a substantial amount of rage filled him. He imagined all of the Gilths he was going to eat if he got out of this in one piece. Finally, he muttered “Twenty”.

“Excellent choice. This shouldn’t take long.”

Jacamar felt his eyes close again and another’s vision enter his mind. It seemed the droid he was looking through was standing in an enclosed space. It looked like the interior of a large van. There was a medical table and what looked like some kind of overhead scanner.

“Are you familiar with the weapon known as a moisture disrupter?”

Jacamar shuddered a little. He had been the target of one of these distasteful weapons once. He wasn’t sure how they worked, but he knew they were very effective in their primary purpose: pain.

“The apparatus above the medical table is a moisture disrupter, only about ten times as powerful.”

A few minutes passed uneventfully. Finally, a rear door opened, and a female Gra-Luruk stepped inside. She had to squat a little to fit into the vehicle. Jacamar recognized her immediately.

“Sylph…”

“Yes, Sylph.” the Gilth stated. “You both spent a number of weeks together practicing your reproductive functions about four years ago.”

Jacamar might have chuckled at the Gilth’s totally unromantic description of his relationship with Sylph, but he was quickly filling with panic at what he guessed was about to happen.

Sylph’s eyes shifted around the room, then locked with Jacamar’s. She was actually staring in horror at the Darkken Droid she was seeing, but from Jacamar’s perspective she was looking right at him. Her body lurched forward and she stumbled over to the medical table and lied down on it.

The Darkken Droid’s arm raised towards the door that Sylph came through and Jacamar saw the door close itself. He then heard the low chanting of “Kill… Kill… Kill…” start up again.

The moisture disrupter above the table activated, bathing Sylth in a pale yellow light. She immediately let out a high pierced scream and started to writhe on the table. Jacamar had heard members of his species howl in pain before, but this was eerie. She didn't sound 'Luruk.

Sylth continued her verbal anguish for another five minutes, then started spasming on the table. The beam turned off and after a few moments Sylth stopped spasming and started a low howl.

"There's a good chance she has lost her sanity. I believe there has been permanent brain damage. We'll give her a couple minutes to remember what it is like without the pain."

Jacamar could feel tears welling up in his eyes. He wasn't really that close to Sylth, but the fact that she was there because of him was tearing into his soul.

The device activated again a few minutes later, bathing Sylth in the yellow light. She let out a new set of screams and started to convulse violently. This kept up for an eternity as far as Jacamar was concerned, but only lasted about another quarter hour. After a final spasm, Sylth lay motionless on the table. The yellow light faded along with the vision. Jacamar blinked his eyes open, once again seeing the Gilth sitting cross-legged on his table.

"Her brain shut down. She's dead." Jacamar remained silent, seething in his own rage and pain. "Do you understand the task we have assigned you?"

"Yes" he muttered under his breath.

"Good. I suggest you proceed."

Jacamar felt his legs twitch and tried to flex them. All his motor control seemed functional now, so he got up and wandered towards the exit of the bar. En route, he blended into the crowd (no small feat for a being of his size), changed his direction, and slowly made his way to the Vega-Lizards.

As he approached he started to limp and hung his arms low. He grabbed someone's drink at a table he was passing. A sniff told him it was somewhat strong so he drank it, swished it around his mouth and spit it out. All he need was the stench.

He was moderately stealthy and the two Vega-Lizards didn't really notice him until he was only six or seven meters away. They hesitated, not sure if the enormous 'Luruk was a threat or just someone passing by.

Jacamar feigned a stumble, heading towards the Lizards. He made sure that his blasters were well hidden in his fur. When he was just three meters away, he looked up as if noticing the Lizards for the first time.

"Hey!" he bellowed. "Is that the bathroom in there!?" The two lizards glanced at each other, one of them chuckling. At that exact moment, the 'Luruk leaped forward. Hand to hand combat wasn't Jacamar's specialty, but he caught the Lizards off guard. Jacamar raised his fist up and slammed it down onto one of the Lizard's heads. The other Lizard watched in horror as his companion's head was driven down into his chest. By the time he had presence of mind to draw his weapon, Jacamar had pulled his two mammoth pistols. The remaining Lizard soon joined his companion on the floor.

An hour later, Jacamar was walking towards the bar he was originally at. The battle inside the private room had been swift. When the Human, Mavvice, and Chork realized that he was after the droids, they chose to flee. The droids were brought down with Jacamar's blasters, and then stomped on repeatedly, just to be sure.

Part of his mind told him to flee, head to the spaceport and get on the first available ship. But a compulsion forced him onward to the bar. He passed by the entrance, and decided that a nearby alley was where he should go.

As he entered the alley, he could see the Gilth standing a few hundred meters away, surrounded by cloaked figures. He could make out their green eyes within the cowls of their cloaks. The Gilth motioned him forward and Jacamar walked on, his mind dreading what could happen next.

"Excellent job Jacamar." The Gilth said as Jacamar joined the group. Suddenly, Jacamar felt himself grabbed by the head and yanked upward. "It took some doing to install a force beam that could lift you in the air." The Gilth commented. Jacamar felt his neck stretching as he was suspended in the air by his head.

"What now?" Jacamar growled under his breath. The Gilth just smiled at him as the droids started to set up additional force beams. His arms and legs were grabbed and stretched out away from him. One of the droids stepped up to him and removed his beloved pistols. Another droid approached, reached up and injected something into his arm.

"Hey! What are you injected me with." Jacamar could feel a tingling on his arm, which quickly traveled to the rest of his body.

"Just something that will make all of you fur fall out." The Gilth calmly stated.

"What? Why the hell for?"

"Why, to make it easier to skin you, of course." Jacamar stared down at the smiling Gilth. The fear and dread that was building since this ordeal started, indeed ever since the initial battle with the Darkken Droids, seemed to fade now that he knew it would soon be over.

"Any last requests?" The Gilth asked as the droids converged and started to pull out Jacamar's fur. It came out easily.

Jacamar stared at the Gilth, then at the glowing green eyes surrounding him. "I want to kill the Gilth."

The droids backed off and one of them turned off the force beam holding Jacamar's right arm. It came free as the Gilth stepped forward.

"Granted" he said calmly. The Gilth stared blankly for a moment, and then blinked a few times. His luminescent eyes glowed red as the Gilth's suppressed psyche reemerged. His first action was to squat a little and looked around frantically. He saw the huge creature before it, looked up at Jacamar's murderous gaze and turned to run. Jac swung his arm down, snatching the Gilth before it could flee. As the tiny creature let out a horrified scream, Jac swung his arm up, placed the squirming Gilth part way into his mouth, and clamped his jaws shut.

Jacamar felt a little guilt as the Gilth's various fluids and organs oozed around his mouth. It wasn't the Gilth's fault that the Darkken Droids were using him as a tool. Still, the last act of savagery felt good. He spit out the remains as his right arm was grabbed again and held immobile by the force beam.

All but one of the Darkken Droids returned to finish removing Jacamar's fur. The one remaining stayed motionless, staring at Jac. It then pulled out a short metal blade.

"Are you ready for the rest of your punishment?" The droid didn't speak. Jacamar heard the thoughts directly in his mind.

"Just get it over with." He grumbled. The rest of the droids, having finished their task, backed away from the now hairless 'Luruk. The droid with the knife stepped forward.

"Very well." Jac heard in his head. The droid slashed down into Jacamar's thigh, and then started to slice away a small piece of skin. Jac let out a low growl as the pain flashed through his leg. *"Let's start at number one."* Jacamar felt his eyes close against his will and another vision entered his mind. The "Kill... Kill... Kill..." chanting started up.

"WAIT! You said if I killed those Kvankii droids you wouldn't do this!" he yelled.

"I believe what we said was 'Unless you do exactly what we say, you will witness them all suffer an extraordinarily painful death.' We are no longer going to cause 'extraordinarily painful' deaths. Because you assisted us, we will be merciful."

Jacamar saw what looked like a training facility. The NastiDyne logo was on the various buildings. A large set of cross hairs was directly in front of him, and he could just make out the edges of the sniper scope he was looking through. The scope zoomed in on one of the entrances to the building just as a 'Luruk stepped out of the door. Jac recognized him as one of his former instructors. The 'Luruk looked around confused, as if not knowing why he left the building.

A bright particle beam impacted into the Gra-Luruk directly above his left eye. He collapsed and the beam struck a few more times to ensure he wouldn't be revived.

"You see? He suffered not at all." Jacamar was about to speak again, but felt the Darkken Droid stab down again on his leg, removing more skin. His concentration has been on the vision in his head, so he hadn't prepared himself against the pain. He let out a sharp roar as he fought to regain control.

"Come on! You're going to kill me already. You don't need to put all this effort into killing people I know."

"Now Jacamar, do you honestly think that we would mobilize so many of our brothers and not give them a chance to kill? That would be... cruel."

Jacamar's vision shifted again. A new set of cross hairs were looking down at their next victim. More of Jacamar's skin was removed. All the while Jacamar heard the low chanting of "Kill... Kill... Kill..."

Over the next several hours, Jacamar witnessed the death of various friends, his parents, sister, sister's family, and assorted former lovers. All of the executions were relatively quick and painless. By the time of number seventy-seven, most of Jacamar's skin was gone, along with his eyes, ears and tongue. Number

seventy-seven was a young female Gra-Luruk that Jacamar didn't recognize. Jacamar saw her get into a land vehicle with some other young 'Luruks. As the vehicle started to move it exploded in a large fireball.

"That was the child of number forty five. During your time together, she allowed herself to become pregnant. You just witnessed your daughter's death."

Jacamar let out a low moan. He was emotionally and physically drained. He could feel himself holding onto his last thread of sanity, wishing for death.

One left. The last shift of Jacamar's vision showed Jacamar the alley he was in. He could see himself hanging against one side of the alley, his arms and legs spread open. The sight of his mutilated body made Jacamar's stomach lurch and he fought the urge to retch. The Darkken Droids surrounding him moved to the other side of the alley and hid. Jacamar thought he saw them all pull out pistols.

"Jac!" he heard a bellow from down the alley. Through the Darkken Droid's vision, he saw Gormanov running down the alley towards him.

"No Gor, get out of here! Run!" Jacamar bellowed, but without a tongue, the words were barely recognizable.

Gormanov ran up and stood for a moment staring at his friend hanging like a piece of meat at a butcher shop. Jac saw through his vision one of the Darkken Droids raise a plasma blaster and aim it at the back of Gor's head.

"Nooooo!" Jacamar bellowed unintelligibly again. Gor just stared up at Jac, unsure of what to do. Suddenly a bolt of superheated plasma passed through the back of Gor's head, out his left eye socket and into Jacamar's chest. The rest of the droids opened fire as Gor started to fall, most blasts of plasma going through Gor's body and into Jac's torso.

Gormanov fell and the droids emerged from hiding. Each one fired a single shot into Gormanov's head, making it unrecognizable.

Jacamar was bleeding profusely through the various new holes in his body. Barely conscious, he moaned low and through his vision of the scene, saw one of the Darkken Droids aim its pistol at Jacamar's face.

"Thus ends your punishment." Jacamar heard in his mind right before the pistol discharged. A bolt of superheated plasma burrowed a hole through Jacamar's brain, finally ending his torment.