


# STAR WARS

## RED HARVEST

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*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

## 6/Hot Ships



IT WAS AFTER MIDNIGHT IN THE ACADEMY'S MAIN HANGAR. FINISHING UP THE LAST of his maintenance chores, Pergus Frode found himself glaring at the Corellian cruiser still taking up space in the corner of the landing pad. He'd refueled the craft and kept its engines hot, as its pilot had demanded, but that had been several hours ago and there'd been no word from the bounty hunters. Now it was late and he wanted nothing more than to shut things down, go back to his quarters, and collapse into his bunk.

With a sigh, he went back to the hangar's control booth and sealed the hatch behind him. At least it was warm in here, a haven away from the wind. When he'd first taken over the job almost ten standard years earlier, Frode had retrofitted the booth to meet his needs, installing a personal thermal convection unit for hot meals along with a datapad for his favorite holobooks and holomags. As a hired hand, he had no Force powers and no particular allegiance to the Sith per se; he'd only encountered Darth Scabrous on a handful of occasions. But the last

and only time that he'd ignored orders to stay up and wait, he'd spent a week in lockup icing a broken jaw.

Settling back with a reheated cup of Javarican espresso and a well-worn holo of *Hot Ships*, Frode saw something flicker past the booth. He sat up and wiped a hole in the steamed-up glass, peering out. The HK was standing there, its photoreceptors focused in on him.

Frode stood up and opened the hatch. "Hey."

The HK turned and looked back at him. "Query: What is it, sir?"

"How much longer are those guys going to be in the tower?" Frode pointed at the cruiser. "I mean, their ship's just sitting there, eating our fuel."

"Response: I suppose you ought to shut it down."

"But that guy Dranok said—"

"Statement: He won't be coming back, sir. He, or his partner."

Frode blinked. "What, you mean, like, ever?"

"Response: That is my understanding, sir, yes."

Pushing back his mission cap to scratch his head, Frode turned his attention speculatively back to the bounty hunter's vessel. "You know," he remarked casually, "a ship like that's gotta carry a pretty sophisticated flight computer."

"Statement: I'm sure I wouldn't know anything about that, sir. The equipment of such vessels is not part of my programming, and—"

"You don't think Lord Scabrous would mind if I yanked her out, do you?"

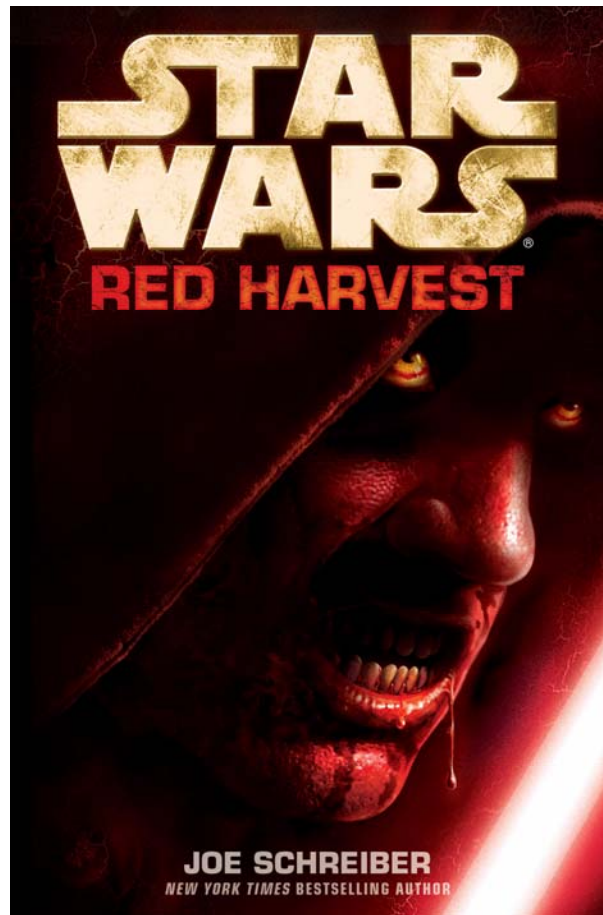
The HK regarded him blankly.

"You know, set it aside. Scrap-market value on that thing's not too shabby."

"Statement: I'm sure you could help yourself," the droid said, with bottomless indifference, already turning away to go about its business.

Settling his cap back on his head, Frode nodded and got his tools, whistling a little under his breath as he did so.

Maybe, he thought, tonight would turn out well after all.



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