

## Chapter 5 – Feeling Out Mos Eisley

The scanning blue lights of the antique door sensor unit jumped back and forth, and a low, gurgling sound streamed out of it as we passed through the vestibule of the Mos Eisley Cantina. The bartender glanced up at the sound, and with a weary scowl, went back to pouring his drinks.

The room was alive with the sounds of voices and music. The roar of many voices speaking at once was competing with the Bith band in the corner, busy jamming out their music. It reminded me of the mixed sounds drifting out of some of the little pubs way down on the surface of Coruscant, the ones that served the best tasting food, the ones you had to really look hard for.

It was dimly lit by small table-top luminaries and a light hanging over the bar. The uneasy air was thick with the smoke from a dozen or more pipe smokers seated throughout the room and at the bar, mindlessly fogging the room with their intoxicating, aromatic haze. The bartender was serving 2 twin females at the bar, and trying a little too hard to impress them.

Tables filled with patrons, local regulars and pilots from the spaceport, littered the floor surrounding the central bar and were filled with heated card games and half empty drinks. Recessed table alcoves scalloped the exterior walls, for those customers seeking, a bit more privacy.

The others walked down the steps. Taka, Rogue and Topolev headed for the bar. I followed down into the room, slowly scanning for the Wook. I didn't see him, but the place was packed with an impressive array of outlanders, spacers and throttle jocks from all over the known galaxy. Falker and Blade were checking out the crowd as well.

Rogue had made himself at home and was talking to the twins at the bar as he waited for his drink. They laughed and drank Sullustian wine as they moved closer to him, hanging on his shoulders. His drink was slammed down on the bar in front of him, the contents of the container sloshing over the rim. He looked down at it and then up to the bartender as the rotund server turned his back and moved on to the other numerous orders awaiting him. Taka caught Rogue's eye and shook his head at the poor service.

Topolev received his drink in much the same manner as Rogue and walked past me toward the band. I heard him talking to one of the locals, asking about the music. Figrin Da'n and the Modal Nodes was their name. Only on Tatooine. He walked over to them, eyes skimming over the dimly lit crowd as he walked through the room. The Bith band members played very unusual instruments and swayed and pitched their large bulbous heads around in time with the music. Their long fingers moved with agile skill over the keys and sensors producing a bouncy, smooth sound.

4120 had a dark, brewed drink with thick foam sitting on top and was walking through the crowd, scanning the room. As my eyes swept the crowd, I noticed a dark, hooded figure with a broad, long beak wearing large goggles watching him from just outside one of the dimly lit side alcoves. 0600 walked over to me and handed me one of the brews.

“Cheers”, he said, holding out the drink. I took the container and nodded in the direction of the dark creature watching our XO, and 0600 flicked his eyes to the creature.

“He’s been watching 4120 since we walked in. I was looking for the Wookiee I saw earlier when I spotted this guy. He’s taking quite an interest.”

We both moved to the outer edge of the room and wandered slowly toward him, watching as his attention was focused on 4120 and not us. A green-skinned Rodian pushed gruffly past 0600, giving a grunt and a surly look as he passed. He moved a little too quickly, but no one seemed to be following him. He wore a gun belt and was looking around the room nervously.

We moved closer to the dark, robed figure just ahead. He was making squeaking noises into a device in his palm, when his head jerked in our direction as he caught sight of us. It was, however a moment too late, as 0600 and I took him by the arms and shoved him into the adjacent alcove, knocking into the table inside. We startled a Bith, seated alone, drinking at the table. He knocked over his container in his scrambling attempt to escape unharmed.

I shoved the creature to the bench seat as he squeaked in fear. I held tight and took a deep sip of my drink and looked around the room to see if anyone had noticed. The barkeep was watching, but when he caught my eye, quickly turned back to his other patrons.

0600 placed an extended finger to his mouth as he stepped in front of the captive. The struggling figure quieted. My fellow trooper pointed to his ear and shook his head to let him know we didn’t understand. I turned my head to scan the outer room again, no civilians seemed to have noticed our move, although the other members of our party had seen our takeover of the Bith's table, and were walking our way.

0600 put his drink on the table and withdrew a small earpiece from his belt and placed it over his ear, switching the small device on. I motioned for him to speak again. He started squeaking, and the earpiece scanned varying conversion algorithms, until 0600 heard the squeaks translated into Basic. He looked up to the creature, nodding his head. The dark figure began again.

“I am Garindan. You don't have to use your hands, I understand you perfectly. I simply lack the vocal cords to reproduce your language. I have served the Empire before, here on the Streets of Mos Eisley, when the other troops were here before you.”

He shook his head as he saw our realization. “Yes. I know you are in service to the Emperor. I worked with the last unit stationed here many seasons ago to gather and funnel intelligence from the streets and would like very much to continue that with you, in exchange for your good favor, small shipments of Spice to support my habit, and the occasional turning away of your eye to my deeds.”

Rogue, Topelev, Etz and 4120 were now standing just outside the booth area, watching the crowd as 0600 digested what he had just heard. Taka was in position near the door with Blade, watching the entrance. Falker and 1265 covered the back door as Ddraig moved through the crowd, watching everyone.

0600 lifted his drink and took a long sip. "We have us a snitch, guys, and he's looking for work."

Rogue ran his eyes over the cowering form of Garindan, "What makes him think we need or want his assistance, and why should we believe anything he tells us?"

0600 commented as he switched his earpiece onto speaker mode, "He can understand what you're saying, ask him."

We all pulled closer to listen over the noises of the bar as Garindan began speaking again, "I know this city, and the people in it. They come and go, but it is usually the same faces. Occasionally there are newcomers, but they pass through here either arriving to stay, or leaving for good. I can help you, and my needs are few."

Rogue was thinking, staring at the luminary on the table, as 4120 broke the silence, pushing Garindan aside to speak privately to us, "You heard the holo, we're outside the Legion, hell even outside the Empire on this one. We're hanging out here all by our lonesome and we could use some help to hit the ground running. If his knowledge of the city and its people is as good as he's boasting, it'll make our lives a lot easier. He may even have already heard something that could help us with our current mission."

4120 moved back, allowing Garindan closer again. Rogue nodded in agreement as he looked at the snitch, "OK. We'll try this and see how it works, understand? If it doesn't, or you cross us, I will have no hesitation about making you disappear from the streets of this city as if you never existed."

Garindan nodded his understanding. I released my grip on his arm and took a deeper swallow of my drink as he straightened his cloak.

Rogue pulled a commlink from his belt and handed it to our new agent. "Use this if you uncover anything of use to us. I will answer." Garindan nodded again as Rogue continued. "There are others sweeping the landscape right now searching for an escape pod beacon. There is something of interest to us onboard. Have you heard talk of this or did you see a pod come down?"

The snitch thought a moment, and then spoke, "I have not heard of what you speak, nor have I seen any such object fall from the sky, but this is a big place. I know that some of the desert scavengers, the Jawas, have huge Sandcrawlers that crisscross the desert in search of scrap and salvageable parts and supplies. If anyone would know about it, they would. They may even already have the item for which you search. Let me see what I can find out, and I will report in shortly."

Rogue nodded, allowing Garindan to slip between us and make his way past Falker and 1265, out the back door of the Cantina. We all slid into the bench seat and took over the table we had been standing around. Etz put his plate of food on the table and spoke up first, "I have a very bad feeling about this." Topolev grabbed a piece of grilled meat from the plate and took a bite, as Etz shot him a look. The others casually walked over to the table, still watching the crowd.

We all considered his comment, then all started to speak at once. 4120's voice was the loudest, so he continued, "If it doesn't work, we make a public example out of him, showing how bad an idea it is to cross us. I see this as a win-win situation. If it works out, we find the pod and the information; a rapid success for our first mission here. If it fails, we sacrifice the snitch, instilling a little fear in the local residents, and still find the missing intelligence. It may take a little longer, but the result will be the same either way. We stand to lose nothing."

Several nods of agreement came back from around the table as we all now ate from Etz' plate. Rogue raised his container above the luminary, "To our first night in our new post. To the Sandtroopers of the 104th Moisture Farm Patrol. Long Live the Emperor!"

We all raised our cups and brought them together in the center of the table before each downing a mouthful of the intoxicating liquids. As I swallowed, I noticed a large hairy beast coming down the steps into the bar. The Wookiee had decided to drink tonight after all. For his size, he moved with incredible agility through the crowded room toward the rear of the bar.

An old man standing at the bar stopped the hairy hulk, and the two spoke for several minutes. They both nodded their heads slightly, and the old man smiled, patting the Wook on the shoulder as their conversation came to a close, as if they knew each other.

The Wookiee continued on toward a dimly lit table in the back of the Cantina as the old man pulled his hood up around his face. I turned my head to follow the Wook to the table, and when I looked back to the bar where they had been, the old man was gone.

The dim table in the alcove contained a human seated with a lady friend, having drinks. He wore a vest, and military trousers bearing a broken red stripe down the outside of the legs. Somewhere in his past, an act of extreme bravery had earned him the distinction of the Corellian Blood Stripe. He and the woman were reclining quite comfortably as they watched the band play.

His eyes cautiously flicked toward the door occasionally, making sure he knew who was coming and who was going.

The Wook slid in on the opposite side of the table. The human sat up, leaning away from the girl, and had a small conversation with the Wookiee. The Wook grunted and nodded, rising from the table, crossing the floor of the bar and disappearing out the front entrance. The pilot took a final swallow of his drink, and settled back in with his companion.

I finished my drink and rose "I'm going to get a little air", moving to follow the hairy beast. The entry sensor gurgled its' blue light again as I walked past, out into the sandy street.

The Tatooine night air was cool, and the vast sea of stars above had popped from the hazy blue sky of the daylight and now shone brightly against the endless black. I thought of the Sentinel crew flying their sweeps, and how we would join the search in the morning. I watched as the giant Wookiee walked away down the street . . . almost out of sight, then he turned and disappeared into the hallway leading to the spaceport docking bays, most likely heading back to

their battered Corellian YT-1300 freighter.

The Rodian from inside the bar pushed past me and muttered something under his breath as he made his way down the street toward the hallway the Wook had just taken. He stopped, turned around, and scanned both sides of the street before disappearing down the dark passage himself. Several ships were lifting off from their bays, and a Dewback grunted and coughed to my right, as it rattled the restraints holding it in place.

I heard a throaty cry from far off, echoing on the winds . . . more strange creatures to discover. I was just about to follow the Rodian, when the rest of the group came through the door.

"All right, let's get some sleep. I have an alert set to wake us just before first light. We need to be in bay 98 waiting for that drop ship" said Rogue as he handed me a container of warm food. I put a piece of the grilled meat in my mouth and began to chew as I turned to look at the passage once more before following the others across the street to our barracks.

It would keep.

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