

CH 2: Velossis

Dazed and confused he awoke near dusk on the plains of Garanthor, his senses reeling. Startled and befuddled he stood only to stumble about tripping over one of the many corpses that littered the land around him. He rose to his knees and gazed at the landscape. As far as he could see it was corpses everywhere, with the exception of small patches near him the ground could not be seen. The stagnant stench of death filled the air with a potency that stung the senses. The scavenger birds cawed and pecked at the flesh of the Humans, Patarins, and Arnborans strewn across the terrain. Looking down he noticed the blood adhering to his hand. The blood had begun to dry and was sticky as he touched his fingers to his palms. After gazing down at his hand for a few moments and seeing the tatters left after the battle he began to regain some cognizance.

"Where the hell am I?" He thought aloud.

Continuing to gaze at his hands he noticed the contrast between his left and right arm. His right arm like the rest of his naked body was pale and indicative of a Human; his left arm was completely black. The arm had a presence of its own, seemingly darker and deeper than space itself. As he stared at it he started to feel as if the presence within the arm was pulling towards him. Suddenly he felt as if he had entered the darkness and the darkness had entered him. With this palpable sensation washing over and through him he saw many planets, races, the universe itself in many different ways. In shock he pulled his arm away removing himself from the trance. Trembling he still could do nothing but stare at his left arm, only now keeping a distance from it.

"What the hell is this?" Is all he could say or think.

Confused and exasperated he dropped his arm to rest it on the ground but found a corpse instead. The corpse turned into the same dark substance as his arm and shattered, the minute black particles spreading all around him for a moment then dissipating. He found himself once again peering at his own arm, now with a newfound sense of dread and fear. The young man contemplated what kind of force his arm possessed, which led him to an even more disturbing inquiry. What kind of being was he to be able to house such a power within his own body? At that point a single thought moved through his mind and over his lips uninterrupted by any other thoughts. "What am I?" He exclaimed.

With sudden force his eyes flung open as Max awoke with a sense of intensity.

"Bad dream?" The Velossion standing in the doorway inquired. Max sat up and turned facing the insect-like biped, still on the chaise lounge he had been resting on and stared blankly for a small moment before speaking.

"What did the council say?" Max asked curtly.

"What makes you think they have reached a decision?" The Velossion retorted.

"You don't do anything without reason. If they hadn't reached a decision you wouldn't have come down here yourself." He said bluntly.

"How cold, I could have just come down here to spend time with my old friend." He said with an attempted tone of innocence.

"They said yes." Max stated.

"Very astute, what gave it away?" The Velossion asked with a smirk in his voice.

"If they hadn't you wouldn't be this playful." The man quipped.

"You have the council's full support. So, are you going to tell me what the dream was?" He inquired.

"A memory long passed." He stated plainly.

"Oh come now you don't expect to get off with just that do you? After I put my head in striking distance of the council's claws, indulge me." He said attempting to persuade his alien guest.

"You are a persistent bug Pott." He sneered.

"That's quite a comment coming from you Max. You have eluded the military for how many years now? You are probably the most persistent and stubborn being I have ever known." Pott quipped.

"Then it should be no surprise for me to leave you in the dark." Max replied.

"Well you can come to the celebration dinner tonight to make it up to me." Pott proposed.

"Afraid not. I have been here too long as it is." Max said as he rose to his feet.

"You come here and make a proposition that draws the council into deliberations, stay in our headquarters, then refuse our hospitality upon completion.? That comes off as a bit ungrateful." Pott decreed.

"Necessity will do that." Max said

"If anyone else had done that the agreement would have been overturned and they would have been eviscerated." Pott stated.

"That is the point though isn't it? I am not anyone else." Max said.

Pott chuckled. "Do you at least have time to have lunch with me before you go?" Pott queried. "I think I can manage that." Max said as he grinned at his old friend.

A young man awakes from a drunken stupor within the confines of Tartarus, his head resting against the wall behind him. His short brown hair strewn in disorder. His blue overcoat in tatters and his clothes caked with dirt. He sat on the bench along the far wall with his feet propped up on a chair; on the table in front of him held the bottle of whiskey from the night before with but a trickle of alcohol remaining.

Leaning his head forward he wipes the drool that oozed from his gaping mouth. The cold steel door creaked as it swung open and the morning light burst through the relative dimness of the bar blinding those who caught the rays in their eyes including the young man at the bench.

An older man about mid-fifties with a slightly rotund figure walked through the door in a very casual manner.

The bartender looked over at the man and his expression turned disgruntled. "Hey Nigel, can't you tell your friends not to wreck my bar?" The bartender touted.

"Hey it was one of your regulars that couldn't keep his hands to himself. Tell them to have some manners." Nigel retorted.

"Well it was your friend that killed the Arnboran and I don't need security up my ass. So if your clients don't behave themselves you're going to have to find another place to do business. I haven't had that much trouble since that guy with the metal arms was in here." Said the bartender.

"Alright alright settle down. I'll do what I can to 'stem the tide' as it were. Ironical that you would bring him up though." Nigel stated.

"How's that?" The bartender asked.

"He's who my client was looking for. And not both of his arms are metal. One is a synth-limb the other was covered in armor he wore." Said Nigel.

With the last sentences spoke the young man's attention was peaked. He raised his head off the wall, arose from his semi-secluded spot and approached Nigel with determination in his eyes.

"This gentleman with the armor, was his name Max?" The young man asked as he approached.

"What if it was?" Nigel replied.

"Then I would ask that you give me what information you have." The young man responded.

"That is privileged information, if you want it I will need to be, 'coerced' as it were." Nigel said with a maliciously greedy grin.

With a back handed fist he struck Nigel across the face and knocked him on his back and rolled in-between the tables into the wall. He then proceeded to walk over, grasp Nigel by his neck and lift him off the floor so his feet dangled.

"I haven't the time and I have long since lost my patience on this subject, so you will tell me what you know about Max Molderrov and your client and what they may know about him." The young man stated.

"That's a lot of strength you have there. You sure you're human?" Nigel scoffed only to get a better glimpse of the young man's clothing beneath his coat. It was the uniform of the Trans Systems Forces. A glimpse at his collar revealed the insignia of the Onyx Brigade, elite forces of the military.

"Damn it, I'm sick of this shit!" The bartender exclaimed and then drew a blaster from behind the bar.

Before Nigel could gesture the bartender to desist the young man drew a blaster from the inside of his coat with his free hand, turned his head aimed the weapon and fired; forcing the blaster from the bartender's hand and creating a cavity in the gun rendering it useless.

Returning his attention and Nigel and holstering his weapon he resumed his line of inquiries. "Now! What do you know about Maximus Molderrov?" He asked gruffly.

"Alright I'll tell you. From what I heard he was in the Velossis sector, but that was near a week ago." Nigel said with a small tremor in his lip and sweat beading down his brow.

"Well that's a start, and what of your client you spoke of? Who is he?" He spoke with increasing intensity.

"She's a bounty hunter." Nigel replied

"I want a name! And what she knows about Molderrov." He pressed insistently.

"I only know her first name, Melanie. Whatever she knows about him is her own business." He said with a sigh at the end.

"Do you take me for a fool? She must have told you something so you could track him down." He said as he applied more pressure to the sides of his neck.

"Mine is a business of confidentiality and anonymity. I'm known for finding information with minimal information that's why people come to me. Plus, at this point do you think I'm stupid enough to hold anything back?" Nigel retorted.

"I suppose not." He replied. The young officer released his grip from around Nigel's neck dropping him to the floor. "Thank you for your cooperation." He stated with a strangely sincere tone. He bowed his head to Nigel then turned and flung a credit chip at the bartender and stated. "Here's for the gun." He then proceeded to exit the bar, unfettered by the events that had just transpired. As he walked down the street he pulled out a recorder and began an entry.

Major Theodore Carrman, Trans System Forces, Onyx Brigade, 9th Battalion, mission log. After nine months of arduous nearly blind searching I have at last come upon a lead on the deserter Captain Maximus Molderrov in the Velossis sector. At first I questioned T.S.F.'s pursuit of a man who went A.W.O.L so long ago, but now I am intrigued myself and it would seem that the T.S.F.'s motive is no longer one of my concerns. Other than his military record I can find absolutely no trace of him except that of word of mouth. Due to his battlefield commission his military record is lacking. While I could digress in what is missing it would seem more prudent to list what is there, which are simply his name, rank, and service history. Other than that he is an enigma. While I have come across several suspected aliases based on his description, there was too much variation to be able to confirm any of them. On a personal note I am torn on wither or not the T.S.F.'s refusal to reassign me to another mission is a blessing or a curse. On the one hand I have many questions about this man and wish to find the answers. On the other hand I am no longer reimbursed for my expenses and have been finding shelter and food where ever I can. I have been living as a pauper for the last six months and want to end this as quickly as possible so I can resume some semblance of a civilized life. If that means bringing Molderrov to justice then so be it. End of log.

Melanie and Ladrion walked through the paths of the Bizarre Bazaar. Everywhere they looked there were creatures and crafts from all over the galaxy. Something snapped at Melanie as she passed by one of the many stands. She looked down to find a Creenok Touloss staring up at her with its milky eyes and couldn't help but notice all the spines sticking up from its pale blue skin.

"Bloody mongrel." She sneered.

"So where are we headed first?" Ladrion inquired.

"I'm going to hunt for information on Max with the vendors. You can look where ever you want." Said Melanie.

"Wouldn't it be more prudent for us to stick together?" Asked Ladrion.

"Like I said you can do what you want." She replied

"If I have done something to offend you I apologize, however I would like to know what it was so I may avoid doing so in the future." Said Ladrion.

"Look! I'm not used to having someone along, so just go find your own leads and contact me if you find something." Said Melanie curtly.

"Very well, I shall check in with you in about two hours." Ladrion said meekly.

The two parted ways and disappeared into the crowd of the bazaar. Melanie slowly strolled through the paths and alleys examining the faces of each vendor, looking for someone who would have information. She walked for nearly an hour before coming across a Dela'ch. She casually walked up to the rat-man's booth and pretended to browse through his wares. The vendor turned and took notice of the young woman.

"A human, how unexpected! I don't see many humans much less one as lovely as you. My name is Tam. Please, have a look, let me know if anything catches your eye." Said the furry figure.

Melanie grabbed a pocket watch up from the table. It was slightly tarnished; she slowly ran her thumb across the dragon engraved on it.

"How much for the pocket watch?" Melanie asked.

"Ah, that. I've had that thing for years. Only you humanoids seem to seem to have any interest in old time pieces. You can have it for five Tal'lar."

"Tell you what, I will give you twenty credits for it, and you answer a few questions along with it." Melanie proposed.

The Dela'ch smirked and leaned forward.

"Or we could retire to my back room for questions and you can keep the watch as a gift." Tam suggested.

Melanie showed a grin and leaned forward then suddenly grabbed Tam by his furry throat and drew her hunting knife.

"Or I could make myself a new rug and let you see the result." Melanie stated with maliciousness.

"T-Tell you what, keep the watch and I'll answer whatever questions I can." Replied Tam.

"That's most generous of you." Melanie said with a grin as she released Tam's trachea. She then sheathed her knife and proceeded with questions.

"I am looking for someone, a human man with synth-limb right arm and armor on his left, about 183cm." She said

"Sorry, I haven't seen anyone like that." Replied Tam

"Think hard about that, you don't want that to be your final answer." Melanie said as she glared.

"Believe me if someone like that had been through here I would remember. Like I said earlier, not many humans come through here. They have a tendency to stick out. However I know someone who keeps closer tabs on visitors than I do, He may be able to help you. His

name is....”

Melanie’s com. unit began to chime.

“Make it fast!” Melanie grunted into her unit.

“I found a lead; he has been seen near the capitol building recently.” Ladrion said through the distortion of the com speaker.

“Copy that, will rendezvous shortly. Well it seems your information won’t be necessary. Thanks for the watch.” Melanie said with a smirk.

Melanie approached the steps of the capitol building, surveying the area for Ladrion she couldn’t help but notice the architecture and how reminiscent it was of ancient Greece. She thought how it seemed a strange contrast from the organic buildings usually seen on the planet. No sooner did she think that when she noticed Ladrion atop of the steps.

“So give me the details.” Melanie said as she finished ascending the steps.

“Ah, there you are! I asked around and found that he had been spotted coming in and out of the capitol building.” Said Ladrion.

Melanie drew back a little in surprise. “That’s odd, why would he be in a government building? He’s been on the run for years.”

“Exactly! He wouldn’t be there unless he had some kind of business; so I made an appointment with the minister of foreign affairs.” Said Ladrion

“Umm. Wait, WHAT!” Melanie exclaimed.

“Are you mad? Suppose they are allies. You start asking questions and they’ll gut you.” Melanie proclaimed.

“Not if we stick to the subject of Max and not dig any further. True they are very private about their affairs but the respect law enforcement and bounty hunters. They seldom interfere with criminal apprehension.” Stated Ladrion.

“Hey you are the one who made the appointment. I’m not going to risk disembowelment on your amateur attempt of investigating.” Said Melanie.

“I know I can’t force you to accompany me, however having you along would increase my chance of success and survival. You are an officially licensed bounty hunter. I on the other hand am no one. I can ask questions but if they press me for identification your credentials will go a lot further. I will go by myself if I have to but it would be prudent if you were there with me.” Ladrion articulated.

Melanie sighed. “You really were raised by elves weren’t you?”

“What is your point?” Said Ladrion

“You talk just like them. Fine I’ll go, but if we die I will kick your ass in whatever after life we find” She said.

“Fair enough. There was an opening in the ministers schedule so the meeting is in a few minutes. The ministers name is Pottarox, he is a mantis so be sure to stand proud.” Said Ladrion

They began to walk towards the main entrance.

"You are so going to get us killed." She scorned.

"At least you will be working towards your goal while doing so." Said Ladrion.

The butterfly receptionist escorted Melanie and Ladrion into the inner garden where Pottarox stood gazing up at the trees. As they grew near they saw the enormity of his stature. He towered over them at 234cm; even Ladrion was dwarfed in stature by this slender being.

"Thank you for meeting with us on such notice minister." Said Ladrion

"Not at all, bounty hunters are a welcome part of the economy. Plus I couldn't pass up the chance to see a Laudian and an Human teamed up, most peculiar." Said Pottarox.

"I see why you are the minister of foreign affairs." Said Ladrion.

"Oh?" Said Pott

"You seem to have a fascination with other species, who better to handle off-worlders than someone enthralled with them." Replied Ladrion.

Pottarox's mandible tightened up to create an awkward grin and chuckled.

"Very astute young one. So, what can I do for you?" Pott asked.

"We are looking for a human male that was spotted in the area. He has a synth-limb for a right arm and armor on his left." Said Melanie.

"Can't say that sounds familiar. Do you by chance know his name?" Pott replied.

"His name is Max Molderrov, whether he used that name while here is hard to say." She divulged.

"I see. Unfortunately I don't have any information for you at this time but I will inquire with my associates and let you know if I find out anything." Said Pott.

"Thank you very much minister." Said Ladrion

"Now if you'll excuse me I have another appointment shortly." Pott said as he gestured towards the way they came with his long claw-like fingers.

The two gave a small bow and complied.

"That went well." Said Ladrion.

"You really are naïve." Said Melanie.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"He was lying." She said.

"I don't think so. He maintained eye contact and didn't seem nervous or evasive." He replied.

"Reading humanoids isn't the same as reading insects." She said condescendingly.

"What did you see that I didn't?" He inquired.

"Nothing you can quantify." She paused a moment. "It....was something in his eye." She said as she continued onward.

"How can you tell with a mantis?" He asked.

"You haven't spent as much time with bugs as I have. Besides, he was a little too quick to 'help'. He asked just enough to find out what we know. He knows something." She replied.

"Come to think of it he didn't ask what Max was wanted for either; which is unusual for someone in his position." Noted Ladrion.

"Not for a Velosion. They don't bother with the why's when it comes to bounty hunting. Just the who's and where's." She replied.

"Doesn't that make him a little more believable?" He retorted.

"I didn't say he was a BAD liar." She said.

As they reached the foyer Ladrion spotted a human in military attire speaking to the receptionist. His attention was inexplicably fixed on the pair. The receptionist turned her head and pointed over at them drawing the officer's attention to them.

"Umm... Mel, I think we have some trouble." Alerted Ladrion.

"WHAT?" She then turned and saw the man's approach.

"Oh shit. T.S.F." She groaned.

"Excuse me. Major Theodore Carrman."

"Yeah what do you want?" She interrupted.

"I understand you are looking for a specific man, a fugitive." He said.

"What of it?" She replied.

"I would like to ask you a few questions about this man." He stated.

"Piss off! He's my bounty." Melanie said without skipping a beat.

"I am trying to be polite, but I will take you in for questioning if I have to." The Major sneered.

"You have no authority here. You can't hold us." Melanie replied.

"There may be no official relationship between the Trans System Alliance and Velossis, but they seldom interfere in our affairs and often allow us the use of their facilities. You will tell me what you know about Max Molderrov one way or the other." He said as he grew closer to look her in the eye.

Melanie and Ladrion sat upon the cold chairs of the interrogation room.

"I can't believe this shit." Melanie spouted.

"Any ideas on how to get out of this?" Ladrion inquired.

"I'm working on it. Just keep quiet." She replied.

The door opened and Major Carrman stepped through the door. He stood quietly, examining a data flexi.

"You have had an interesting career miss Tollman. Numerous bounties brought in, only one case of having to kill a bounty. You on the other hand Mr. Stoneriver; there is next to nothing about you in almost any database, you might as well not exist. My question at the moment is what are you doing pursuing Max Molderrov?"

"My job." She stated simply

"He doesn't fit your profile; you usually bring in murders, rapists, thieves, and con-men. So why now a military deserter?" He inquired.

"The 10,000,000 Credit bounty is hard to resist." She replied.

"You don't strike me as the type of woman who goes after a bounty solely for the money. You know something about him; something that gives you an edge, and I want to know what it is!" The Major stated with zealousness.

"Maybe I'm just looking for a challenge; you know, tired of the small fries that are so anticlimactic once the chase is finished." Melanie said.

"And so he is just along for the ride?" The Major queried as he gestured towards Ladrion.

Ladrion attempted to speak only to be cut short by Melanie placing her hand on his leg and speaking over him.

"He's my boy toy. I found him in a bar and just couldn't resist."

Ladrion's blue skin cheeks turned black as he blushed and became obviously embarrassed. The Major raised an eyebrow but otherwise retained a solemn expression.

"This is your last....."

"Major a word please." Said a voice through the intercom.

The Major's whole body tightened, his face shriveled with anger. He slammed his fists down upon the metal table in his frustration. Upon raising his hands from the table, dents could be seen where the bottoms of his hands struck the metal surface. He passed through the door to find Pott in the hallway.

"Minister! What...."

"Release them." Pott interrupted.

"That's absurd! I am detaining them for questioning." Said the Major.

"They are bounty hunters and I will not have you stand in their way of pursuing their quarry."

"This is outrageous; the T.S.A...."

"May I remind you that there is no official relationship between Velossis and the T.S.A. Any use of our facilities and jurisdiction is purely at our discretion. We could just as easily cut off all ties with the Alliance. You will release them and any attempt to hinder them within our territory will be considered a criminal act. Release them, NOW." Pott said leaning forward to glare at the Major as he finished his lecture.

"So be it." The Major said begrudgingly. Storming back into the room he spoke loudly and bitterly

"You're free to go, but know this, I will find you again and I will know what you know." He sneered.

Melanie and Ladrion made their way down the corridor, befuddled with their sudden

release.

“What the hell just happened?” Said Ladrion

“I don't know and right now I don't entirely care, I just want to get out of here then we can figure it out.” Said Melanie.

“So you do still want me along?” He asked glancing down at her with uncertain sadness in his eyes.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Melanie asked with shock in both her voice and expression.

“Problems?” Said Pott as he stood in their path with hands poised behind his back.

“You?!” Melanie exclaimed.

“I thought I would bring you your effects.” Said Pott.

“Why?” She asked.

“After being detained I thought it would be the decent thing to do.” Pott said blithely as he handed each of them their respective boxes.

“Cut the shit, why did you spring us?” Melanie demanded.

“Careful young lady, we Velossions have short tempers. If you're not careful I may rend you.” Pott sneered.

“Perhaps if you were like most of your kind, but I suspect you have an ulterior motive. You are merely trying to save face and distract from the subject.” Said Ladrion.

“Very direct isn't he?” Pott commented as he gestured towards Ladrion with his head.

“We have that in common, now are you going to tell us what you're up to?” She asked sternly.

“Walk with me.” Pott said and then turned and proceeded down the stone corridor. Melanie and Ladrion paused only a small moment to glance at each other before following suite.

“I saw the interrogation. You aren't really after the bounty are you?” Pott inquired. Melanie was silent for a small moment then spoke.

“No, I'm not.” She answered plainly.

“You weren't just trying to keep him from getting your bounty; you were protecting Max.” Pott then suddenly pivoted around to look at her.

“He was here. He left not long before you got here. Before you ask I cannot tell you what he was doing here and I don't know where he went. All I can say is look for those disenchanted by the Alliance, that is where you are most likely to find him.” Said Pott.

“He has been running from the T.S.A. for years, of course he will most likely be amongst those against them. I don't need you to tell me THAT.” She said before walking away.

“That pocket watch!” Pott said. Melanie and Ladrion stopped.

“It reminds me of something he would carry. Keep that in mind.” Pott advised.

