

The Tiger, the Sun and the Sand

The story started for our heroes deep with in the Rim, on the edges of Hutt Space, in a region considered by Hutts as disputed space. In this region, factions fight over the trade routes and resources of many plentiful worlds along the Sisar Run and Soccorro space. Along with the Hutts, the Black Bha'lir and Jatayus Outbound vie for power legitimately and illegitimately. Hidden in the shadows of the Empire, the political and economic machinations of many factions flare up rarely beyond back-alley gang fights and privateer squabbles. Too much action would attract unwelcome attention. The last thing anyone wants is the Empire cracking down hard on this region.

Our heroes were simple people trying to get through life as comfortable as possible. The Empire has made it difficult for non-humans and non-conformists to do that, but out here on Soccorro, it's easy to hide from the grip of tyranny. Mal Biron, a Shistavennen scout and smuggler is a new player in the shipping and trade lanes in the region. Established on Soccorro as a hero after being integral in the defeat of the Disac Pirate band plaguing the region, he and his partners started a shipping business of some reputation. His clients vary and his need to expand brought the heroes on board as a new crew for his new ship, the *Nebula Bandit*.

Tellaris Meroth was a Dashade with a great skill of piloting and a strong will. He was a simple being with simple dreams, and working for Mal Biron was only the first step in completing his dreams of complete independence.

Giskwa Gwig, a Anomid adventurer and engineer, was an agent of Caelli-Merced sent to “watch over” the ship loaned to Biron – the *Nebula Bandit*. However, he also had an underlying assignment to watch for something very significant – an EM signature that seems to be prevalent on certain freighter pilots and, as he found out, causing a rampant disease that was ravaging the population of Norble. There was some kind of hyperdrive technology being used recently that had this effect and C-M wants to know what it was.

Vek Defeen the Defel thief, occasional bounty hunter and freelance troubleshooter, had already made a name for himself elsewhere, which is why he was not welcome back to either the CSA or Hutt Space. Finding work for someone like Mal Biron was exactly what he was looking for. Soccorro and the Sisar Run is right in the region of his homeworld and he welcomes a chance to explore the opportunities in a place that Hutts do not completely dominate and CSA is far enough away not to bother him.

“Doctor” Synar Kessen, human field medic, had already established himself within poverty stricken regions of Vakeyya on Soccorro as a humanitarian and charitable doctor. Working for free-clinics that take donations from many sources, including crime syndicates, he worked hard to help the most needy

and poverty stricken with his medical skills. He also worked directly for one particular syndicate leader named Drethaga "Dreth" Oomzaran, patching up his agents in the field when needed, up until about a year ago, when all contact with Oomzaran stopped.

Tarn Cepo, a Nikto pilot signed as first mate. He and Vek had a history, but they kept that to themselves. Tarn had a history of piracy and ship-raiding, and was good in a zero-G environment. He also had a mysterious background that seemed to haunt him every once in a while.

Garik Drase – human technician and slicer – was another one with a mysterious past. So mysterious, he did not seem to remember it all. Young in appearance, but old in experience, he was never caught without his defensive drones hovering about him. He too had a history that stemmed from Soccorro itself and the little known underground holonet called the shadow 'net.

The journeys of the *Nebula Bandit* started out shaky at best. Traveling to Kegan, a world blockaded by two factions - the Iotran Police Force and the Centrality Peace Keeper Force - they were told to break through it and find a lost crew. Unfortunately for them, this lost crew had other ideas. They took the *Nebula Bandit*, leaving its original crew behind. Dodging xeno-phobic locals as well as authorities from the Centrality and Iotran forces, the party acquired another ship and returned to their boss on Soccorro.

Mal Biron revealed that their experience was all part of a test and they were set up. Mal Biron may be their boss but his motivations are not always obvious. Not happy with that, many in the group, most especially the doctor, threatened to quit. However, with gentle persuasion, Mal was able to convince them to return for their next job... a salvage run.

The salvage run took them on the edge of the Novelek Beacon, the enigmatic anomaly of real space and subspace interference. A cross between a dimensional rift and a black hole, this thing has been a bane to space travelers in the region for centuries. Legends surrounding its existence, origins and ultimate purpose were abound through out each society. Within the gravimetric eddies of the Beacon id what appears to be a ship of alien design. Mal Biron wants something off the ship, before someone else gets it.

It turns out that someone else had interests in the derelict ship as well. The Disac Pirates were a once powerful pirate group that Mal Biron himself took on and all but destroyed. Apparently, they are still active in the region and wanted the same thing the crew of the *Bandit* wanted from the derelict. Lead by an Iktotchi thug named Kadar Moxek, the pirates attacked the *Bandit* while deep within the nebula-like Beacon Shadow. After a cat and mouse game on the outer-edges of the Beacon with the pirates, the

crew of the *Bandit* made their way to the derelict. Thanks to certain modifications to their ship made by Caelli-Merced, they were able to dodge the pirates.

The derelict was an alien ship that had seen battle. However, not all the damage was battle damage. The decks and hull had been twisted in ways no weapon could possibly cause. Strange and corrupt creatures inhabited the ship. No bodies were found, but armor and EVA suits showed that they were not like any alien they had seen.

Acquiring not only what they were assigned but a few other things including a glowing pyramid that made the doctor uncomfortable, the team left the derelict. Avoiding challenges such as the strange effects of the Beacon, a creature that the doctor described as a "Force Wraith" and other Disac pirates, the group returned to Socorro with their cargo.

At the briefing with Mal, he asked Vek the Defel to turn over the glowing pyramid that he then gave to a robed individual who also made the doctor uncomfortable – a Sorcerer of Tund.

The next assignment, after some downtime, took the *Bandit* on an Excess Cargo Yield shipment accompanying a Jatayus Outbound shipment of ore. However, as some of the crew were aware, this was not the actual purpose of the trip. The captain, not being totally honest with his crew, veered the ship on to a different hyperspace jump just after their first jump with the ore convoy. Appearing in deep space, they received a signal from Mal Biron's second in command, Kalend Thora the Duros.

She revealed this was all part of a plan to ship arms to a remote shadowport, which she was going to escort them to. However, the group of Headhunter fighters had other ideas. They swooped in and unloaded on Kalend's ship, the *Starknife*, before the *Bandit* could react. However, once they did, the skilled crew commended by the brave Dashade, Tellaris Meroth, made short work of the fighters. To their surprise, however, the fighters were unmanned.

Kalend was badly wounded and the closest place they could get to was Terman Station. They made way to Terman Station slowly, Kalend barely able to fly her ship. Arriving at Terman Station, the group was soon involved in a firefight with a group of mercs. Not feeling very welcome in this region of space, the crew fought off the mercs and quickly got Kalend to the med-bay of the station. Of course, Station security had a few things to say about the hanger incident.

Through an in-depth investigation that led the group into the depths of the station as well as the history of the station, it was learned that the station was previously a Hutt outpost and prior to that, a battle station of Xim the Despot. There were many remnants of the previous owners lurking within the catacombs of

the station. Among them were assassin droids set up to watch for the return of any Xim ancestor. It just so happened that Kalend's ship, the *Starknife*, was previously owned by an ancestor of Xims, which set off an assassin droids, who in turn hired the mercs and arranged for unmanned fighters to attack Kalend.

However, there was more...

Kalend had to have visited this region in the past, so why now. As it turned out, the actions of a certain treasure hunter set off a chain reaction that initialized the assassin droids. The crew stumbled upon the work of Kinsa Doroturo, a Twi'lek treasure hunter. She was seeking something related to the original function of the station, but was interrupted as Vek the Defel took her prisoner, claiming she has a bounty in Hutt Space. Unfortunately, Vek would not be collecting that bounty, as she had certain powerful friends that "arranged for her release" – Force adept anti-Hutt Twi'lek terrorists.

The situation was growing worse because an ancient virus that infected the old Xim systems was infesting other Hutt-era assassin droids throughout the ship. Hundreds were being activated and their programming were being modified to exterminate all organics. The Xim-era virus had even infested nano-technology producing equipment somewhere and created a version of itself to infest organics.

Time as of the essence as the virus grew worse, and each crewmember was battling it on different fronts. Dr. Synar Kessen, human field medic was battling the nano-virus; Tarn Cepo was saving a group of Imperials from hay-wire battle droids; Garik Drase and Giskwa Gwig were both toiling over a solution for the droids and the virus; while Vek and Tellaris along with the mercs that had been duped into attacking previously, together fought the growing army of virus-infected droids.

In the end, they used Xim's old technology against itself and saved the station. In doing, they endeared themselves with the owners of the station, making Terman Station a permanent home away from home for as long as they are in the region. From this, the group came away with a sense that there is great mystery in the region of space, not only surrounding Socorro but also other places. Xim's legacy reaches far and there was not telling now that would play in their overall destiny

Returning to Socorro, Kalend was admitted to a local medical facility and Mal Biron was most gracious.

Returning home found some changes. For one, there were rumors that many of Garik Drase's hacker friends were on a hit list and there was a strong push with in the shadow 'net to "find the key to the puzzle" – the solution to a complex data puzzle on the local shadow 'net he had only been peripherally aware of in the past. Investigating it further found some aspects of it all too familiar to him.

Not only were friends of Drase being targeted but also pilot friends of Tellaris. This all seemed too coordinated to be a coincidence. Additionally, those contacts of Tellaris who were not already dead from this coordinated targeting were dying from some disease. Most were young pilots who retired early to City Norble, but Tellaris did not know what job they had that allowed them to retire early. It must have been a big operation to employ so many and very lucrative at that.

The doctor found that his clinic in the slums of City Vakeyya, although newly stocked with the latest things (thanks to Mal Biron) was all but empty. Many of his regulars were missing. The gang fights that usually feed his clinic with business has died down. It was like the slums had turned into a ghost town.

Even contact with Vek's Soccorran Defel Thieves Guild had diminished. This was a growing concern to all crew members.

After some time off, Mal Biron called the group to his regular meeting room in the Boliscon Towers. There, he made a grim announcement that his was suspending the crews contracts indefinitely and their ship was being grounded until further notice. He gave them a limited severance package until they were able to find other work, but he could not tell them when he will need them again. This came as a shock to the crew.

After everyone was dismissed, Tellaris was witness to something quite unexpected. Someone, a human from what he could tell, barged in to their private meeting demanding to see someone named "Xauburn." This person threatened to take more away than his financial support if he did not find "her." Mal Biron seemed quite angry at the man, but also somewhat subservient. Tellaris left the scene as it continued to get heated.

Despondent with no where to go, the groups scattered to different directions not expecting to see each other ever again, and to some, that would have been too soon.

Tellaris Meroth set out to find him another ship to fly and cargo to haul, when he stumbled across an old Arcona who had a particular interest in him and his former crew, as well as his former boss. He introduced himself as Oomzaran. He had information that would help Mal Biron out of his problem if the group was willing to help. All Tellaris had to do was convince the others to help.

The information was the suspected location of this person named Xauburn. Apparently someone very powerful had a vested interest in her well-being and this person was also helping Mal Biron financially. She apparently was lost somewhere deep in the deserts of Soccorro, on a mission for Mal Biron. The nature of the mission was unknown to Oomzaran.

Although he was not sure he could trust this Arcona, Tellaris wanted to present the group with this information and see what they said. Tellaris went to the doctor first, who seemed to know the Arcona. Apparently, he used to work for him. Surprised to see him after more than a year, Synar agreed to meet with the others and see where this would lead. A person in trouble also tugged at his personal obligations to protect the innocent and injured.

Getting everyone to agree was a challenge, but after some investigation and verification, they agreed to set out to find this person Xauburn. As it turns out, the mission Xauburn was on was related indirectly to the disappearances and assassinations the party was already aware of. On top of that, the region she was lost in is known for its tribal activity. Socorro is host to several nomadic desert tribes, some say whoa re descended from the original Correlian settlers that crashed here long ago. One particular tribe was very barbaric and savage - the Bharhulai. Apparently, something has gotten their ire up and they are now on the warpath, marching out of their normal territories and venturing south. There is rumor that some colonial settlements are under siege.

Oomzaran supplied the guide and the vehicle as well as the general direction to go. The route they were going to take was north west, passing only a few kilometers from Madra, a vacation spot near the eastern mountains, the shadow of a dormant volcano. They had many things to be concerned about while on their trek across the desert: Sink holes, corrosive gas geysers, and indigenous savage semi-intelligent creatures called monnoks.

A sand storm forced the group to Madra. As they drew near, they saw pillars of smoke on the northern horizon. The lights in the city were dim and vehicles were leaving in droves out the south hover-docks. City Madra would soon be under siege by a Bharhulai warband. The party hoped to lay low until the storm passed and get out as soon as they could – let the city handle the siege. But not all in the party could stay out of the fray.

The barbarians had rigged several repulsor-lift engines as siege weapons hurling fire balls of make-shift catapult-rounds into the city. The city defenders, which was anyone volunteering that could shoot, had already entrenched themselves a few hundred meters outside the city, awaiting the main assault. Meanwhile, the barbarians, uncharacteristically organized and tactical, were softening up the defenses little by little.

The party just could avoid getting involved however. Storing their vehicle in one of the southern abandoned warehouses, the group split up. Vek the Defel went out to help out with defenses of the city while the others spread out to learn what they could. Tellaris and Cepo stayed behind to stand guard.

