

“This is the place, Professor.”

Charles Bryant nodded grimly, barely registering the use of his old title. Even though it was just a little over a year ago that he had been teaching class at the University it felt like a different life. He felt like a different person. Now all that mattered was the gun in his hand and the men hiding out in the building across the street that he was planning to use it on.

“Remember what I taught you about finding cover as soon as you breach a building?”

Charles turned to look at the man addressing him. It had taken him months to get used to the ghastly mask that the man wore. Made of mirrored steel, it was in the shape of a smiling devil. When you stared directly at it you saw your own face reflected back at you on the backdrop of that dark creature. The effect was unnerving, and Charles had never seen a glimpse

of the man underneath. Sometimes he wasn't even positive that it was a man at all. All he knew was that this person was regarded by the few who knew him as the best Dark Bounty Hunter in the galaxy.

That's why Charles had sought him out. He knew on his own he wasn't going to be able to do what needed to be done, but a man like this, he made a living carrying out dark deeds. Sure, he was an officially recognized Bounty Hunter, but everyone knew that the man in the mask usually only took the jobs that blurred the line between right and wrong, good and evil. And those missions always seemed to end with a whole lot of people dying.

“Yes, of course,” Charles said, suddenly realizing he had been lost in thought. “Lay down covering fire, stay low, and get behind something as quickly as possible.”

“Correct. I want you to do the exact opposite when we go in here,” the Bounty Hunter said.

Charles arched his eyebrows but didn't question the man. He had been working with him long enough to know that there was always a reason for what he said.

“These men won't expect to be attacked here, least of all by you. They think you're just a college professor,” the Bounty Hunter continued. “What they did to you, what they took from you, it's all a distant memory to them, forgotten in a sea of other crimes and other victims.”

His heart pounding in his chest, Charles cocked his gun and nodded.

“Let's remind them, then.”

After checking that no one else was around the two of them ran across the dark street

towards the run down building. The Bounty Hunter had tracked these men here, to this backwater town on this backwater planet. Charles watched the man run in front of him. Every movement was made with purpose, pre-planned and leading to an ultimate goal. His methods were dark indeed, but his results were undeniable. The price Charles had paid for this man's services had been beyond steep, what most sane men would call outside of the realm of reason. But then again, a man who watched his wife murdered right in front of his eyes wasn't exactly sane.

Still, as they paused outside the door to the building and Charles looked at his own reflection in the Bounty Hunter's mask it wasn't lost on him just who he had made this deal with. But his resolve had never shaken, never once had he hesitated. Tonight their business

arrangement would be concluded, one way or another.

The Bounty Hunter kicked the door hard and rushed into the building firing. Charles was right behind him, gun at the ready. They emerged into a small warehouse area and like the Bounty Hunter had said, these men weren't expecting an attack. They were relaxed, drinking, laughing over stories of their recent conquests, unaware that this would be the night of their deaths.

One thing Charles had learned in his time with the Bounty Hunter was that there was no glory in this kind of fight. It was usually over as quickly as it began and the whole conflict boiled down to a series of quick decisions. Make the right ones and you live, make the wrong ones and you die.

The first thug that Charles saw lunged for his nearby weapon. Charles fired, hitting the man in the head, then quickly scanned for his next target.

“All clear,” the Bounty Hunter announced.

Charles was amazed by how fast the man was. There were five dead bodies in the room, only one of them inflicted by Charles.

“You don’t know who you’re messing with!” a gruff voice yelled.

The Bounty Hunter pointed to a closed door in the back of the room and Charles nodded. He recognized the voice, it was one of the men who had been directly involved in the attack that killed his wife and almost killed him. One of the main people that Charles dreamed nightly about killing.

“Is Uvez in there with you?” Charles yelled out.

“Who wants to know?” Uvez answered.

Charles smiled. Make that two of the main people he dreamed nightly about killing. The Bounty Hunter could sense what Charles was thinking, he could read the dark thoughts running through his mind.

“These men know we’re coming in and they’ll be prepared,” the Bounty Hunter said. “I’ll go in first and subdue them, then you can come and have your revenge.”

The plan sounded fine to Charles and he nodded. He realized that there may be more honor in it if he went in himself, took them both on while they could fight back, but this had never been about honor. He wanted to kill them, plain and simple, and whether or not they were on their feet or on their knees when he did it made no difference to him.

The Bounty Hunter checked his weapons and then walked towards the door. Once there he paused, then turned back towards Charles.

“You know you don’t have to do this, right?”

Charles blinked several times, barely believing what he heard. He had spent months with this man and they almost never spoke about anything other than weaponry, bounty hunting tactics, hand to hand combat, how to track criminals. Never anything personal, only on the day Charles hired him had he made any mention of his wife and his desire for revenge.

“Carrying through with a thing like this, it’s not kind to the soul of a man,” the Bounty Hunter said. “Murder, even justified murder, steals from the fabric of who you are, it robs you of your goodness.”

Charles gestured at the dead bodies in the room.

“Isn’t it a little late for speeches?”

“So far all you have done is kill men who were in the process of trying to kill you. You’ve never done,” the Bounty Hunter pointed at the door, “this.”

Hesitating this close to his goal seemed like madness to Charles but he forced himself to consider the Bounty Hunter’s words. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes but when he did he saw the same thing he always saw. Alison, the love of his life, his beautiful bride, lying on the ground next to him. The details were always perfect. The way the light slowly faded from her eyes, the way the blood caused her hair to clump together and lay across her forehead, the way she had begged him to save her.

Charles opened his eyes.

“Let’s finish this,” he said.

The Bounty Hunter said no more and charged directly through the door in front of him. Gunfire rang out, six, seven shots, and then there was silence. Charles was breathing heavily, his heart pounding in his chest. He could hear movement in the room and then finally, a voice.

“Come in now, Professor,” the Bounty Hunter said.

He walked into the room. It was a small office with two desks. On the floor in front of him were the two men they had been after. Uvez and Hastings, two of the three men directly responsible for the death of his wife. Each of them had been shot several times. They were bound and on their knees. The Bounty Hunter was standing behind them with his arms crossed.

“Do either of you remember me?” Charles asked as he looked upon them.

Hastings spit blood onto the floor and laughed.

“You look like just another punk to me,” he said.

Charles turned to Uvez.

“How about you? Do I look familiar at all?”

“You look like a dead man walking. Any second now the rest of our crew will be here. No way are you getting out of this alive!”

Charles nodded. It didn't matter if they recognized him or not because he recognized them. He stepped forward and put his gun to Hastings' head.

“Hold on just a second man, maybe we can work something out.”

A menacing laugh sounded and it took a moment before Charles realized it was coming from him.

“Please don’t kill me!” Hastings cried. “I’ve got a family. I’m begging you man!”

“My wife begged you for mercy. Did you grant it to her?” Charles asked.

“I don’t know your wife. Maybe you got the wrong man or something. Listen, we don’t do nothin’ unless the boss tells us too. If you’ve got a problem, he’s the one you should be dealing with.”

The mention of their boss pained Charles. He knew of the man, faint whispers and nothing more. Even the Bounty Hunter had struggled when seeking information about the man. He had made it clear that their arrangement would not include finding this elusive boss. If Charles wanted that man dead, he was going to have to find him on his own.

“Please!” Hastings said, tears starting to stream down his face. “I’ve got kids to feed,

that's all. Whatever I did to you, I'm sorry, but you don't have ta kill me over it!"

Charles' hand was shaking. He couldn't believe that this man, after all he had done, after all he had taken away, had the guts to sit and beg for his life.

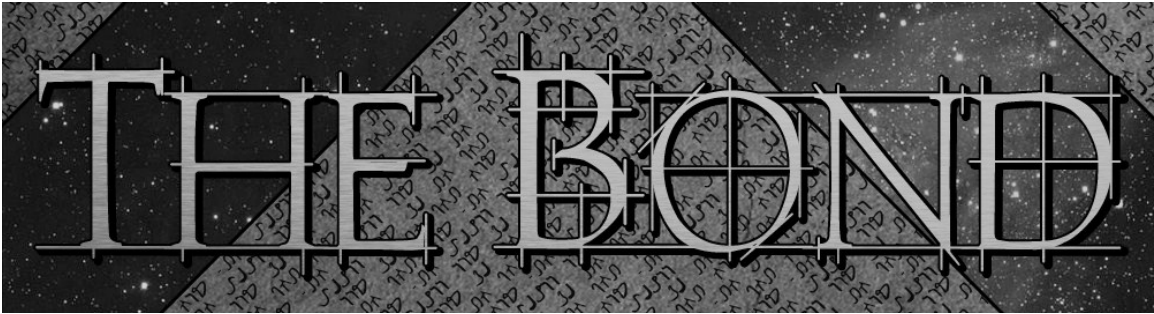
"We need to hurry up Professor," the Bounty Hunter said. "Make your decision and get to it."

Charles looked over at the Bounty Hunter.

"If you pull that trigger your wife will still be dead," the Bounty Hunter said. "You'll still dream of her death every night, you'll still live every day of your life with an empty hole inside of you."

He refocused his attention on Hastings. Charles was done listening to anything other than the screaming, burning need for revenge that had consumed him every day for the past year.

He squeezed the trigger and fired.



CREATED BY PHILLIP HALL

WRITTEN BY A.C. HALL & PHILLIP HALL

EPISODE ONE – “THE SOUL OF A MAN”

TEN YEARS LATER

Professor Charles Bryant stood at the front of his classroom, looking over the thirty three students as they typed in the commands on their

desks to pull up the proper text book. He was clean shaven and wore a brown suit and even had on a neck-tie. It was a classic outfit, the kind only old men and college professors wore these days. Charles had always liked how it made him look and the message it conveyed. He viewed it as a uniform.

On the large screen behind him it said Crime and Criminology 101 and now that most of the students had called up the text he spoke.

“Mankind has come a long ways. With every generation things change and with every age we advance further. Long ago we were stuck on a single planet and today we’re spread all across the galaxy.”

He slowly walked around his desk and continued to speak.

“One thing that doesn’t change is crime and people’s reaction to it. Bad people do bad things, good people want them punished for it.”

Two students raised their hands and he stopped speaking. Charles pointed to a young woman in the front row who was wearing a particularly revealing blouse and a skirt that barely reached her thighs.

“So, you’re like a famous bounty hunter, right?” she asked, twirling her hair as she spoke.

“Right now I’m a Professor trying to teach a class, miss,” Charles said.

He pointed at the other student who had raised their hand. This was a young man sitting in the back row.

“Will you tell us some stories about your bounty hunting adventures?”

“Son, if you want to know about my bounty hunting adventures there are several books in the

campus bookstore all about them. Right now we're talking about crime and criminology, is that understood?"

Over the years he had come to accept these kinds of questions as an unavoidable side effect of his dual life but it still made the first few class sessions grating on his nerves.

"Hey Professor, check it out," another student said.

The young man was pointing at the hat that he was wearing sideways on his head. It said C.U.U., the initials for their college, Covan Unified University, and behind the initials stood the proud outline of Professor Charles Bryant. In small text above the picture it said "home of the bounty huntin' professor!".

Charles rubbed his head. Class had only been in session for five minutes and he already felt a headache coming on.

“Getting back to what I was saying,” he started.

A loud knock interrupted him and he turned to look at the door to the classroom. Charles sighed and walked over to it. He pulled the door open and saw a woman standing out in the hallway. She looked to be in her late thirties and was clearly in rough shape. Her black hair was pulled up into a knot and her face was a mask of stress and worry. Under normal circumstances she would’ve been describable as attractive, but today all she seemed was troubled.

“Mr. Bryant, my name is Penelope Falkinburg and I badly need your help,” she said. “I’ve seen you on the holo-news, they say you’re the best bounty hunter in the galaxy.”

His heart started to pound in his chest in a way it hadn’t in years. He knew exactly what

her presence here meant. Charles glanced back at his students and then stepped out into the hall.

“I need you to track down my husband,” Penelope said. “I always thought he was a good man, and last year when the charges were filed against him, I just didn’t believe them. I couldn’t believe them.”

She paused, trying to keep her emotions under control.

“You posted his bond,” Charles said.

Penelope looked up at him and nodded. Her eyes were filled with sadness, betrayal, and pain. It was a look Charles was all too familiar with. As a Bounty Hunter it was something that he encountered all the time. To get someone out of custody who was awaiting trial you were forced to put up bond. There was a time in the past when this was done with currency, but as galactic economies shifted and piracy and

counterfeiting rose to prominence the justice system made a major change to the way bonds were handled. In order for a person to go free pending trial another person, a willing person, must offer themselves up in trade.

Penelope had done that for her husband. It was usually family members who were too blinded by love or loyalty that did it. With one signature your fate is tied fully to theirs. If they decide to run, if for some reason they don't show up for their day in court, then the person who became a bond for them is arrested and tried in their place. No matter what the crime, no matter what the punishment, it's enacted upon the bond exactly as it would've been the actual individual who was supposed to be on trial.

“The charges just didn't make sense,” Penelope said. “My husband was a business man but these charges, they weren't business

related. They linked him to things, terrible things. They had him pegged as some sort of a leader of all kinds of criminals. Smugglers, raiders, pirates. Killers. It didn't add up. 'Not my husband,' I said. He was just an honest business man, surely the charges were just some big misunderstanding. But..."

Charles knew this next part. He could see it coming from a mile away and only wished that people like Penelope could too so they could be spared what she was now going through.

"But then he took off. I had signed the bond that morning and by the afternoon he had packed up everything we owned. At first I thought he wanted us to run away together. I was going to try to talk him out of it but he just ignored me. Once he was all packed he left. He just walked right past me like I didn't even exist."

She paused and wiped at her eye. She took a long, deep breath and tried to calm herself before she became hysterical.

“I’m sorry, it’s still hard for me to talk about. It’s hard for me to accept that the man that I loved, my husband, would just leave me like that. Leave me to face down these charges, and whatever punishment may come with them.”

Charles nodded but he said nothing. Penelope again had to wipe her eyes before continuing.

“I kept thinking that he was going to come back. I spent an entire month at our house, just believing that he was off somewhere taking care of it, that he was going to come walking back in one day and tell me that it was all okay now.”

She paused and looked up at him.

“Pathetic, right?” she asked.

“How much time is left on the bond?”

Charles asked.

Penelope looked down at the floor. She appeared to be embarrassed by the question.

“Three days.”

Bonds were set up for six months. People like Penelope who had been skipped out on usually hired Bounty Hunters after a month or two, giving them plenty of time to track down the bond jumper and bring them back before the trial. Three days was nothing. Three days was a problem.

“I just kept hoping he’d come back,”

Penelope said meekly.

Under normal circumstances, Charles wouldn’t even consider taking the job. But these weren’t normal circumstances, he had known that the second he saw her. His mind was already racing, piecing together an intricate plan,

a precise course of action that would crumble if even the slightest thing went wrong.

He was aware that she was watching him closely, waiting for an answer.

“I don’t discuss bounty hunting while I’m teaching,” Charles said sternly. “I’m certain you know your way off campus.”

He turned and started to walk back into his classroom. Penelope was stunned at his sudden exit and she reached out for him.

“Please, you have to help me!”

“I’ve got a class to teach,” Charles said as he started to close the door. “Good day Mrs. Falkinburg.”

Penelope started to cry as he closed the door.



As soon the last student left the classroom Charles closed the door, then sat down at his desk. He swept his hand across it, clearing off the lesson plans, teacher mail, and other programs that were open. Once the screen was blank he typed in commands, pulling up the planetary communication systems, then dialed a number and waited.

“I was expecting your call,” a voice answered.

Charles leaned back in his chair, knowing how important this conversation was.

“You told me that if you ever sent a bond to talk to me at the university it would mean that they were directly connected to the man who killed my wife,” Charles said.

He rarely spoke of his wife to anyone and some nights he didn't even have nightmares about her death. But he had never let go, he

couldn't let go, not until the last man was dead, the man who had proven too elusive to be tracked down. Until now, apparently.

“That is what I told you.”

The man on the other end of the communication was Jerry Rapada, the premiere bondsman in this corner of the galaxy and one of only two people that Charles considered a friend. He was the only man who knew the true depths of Charles' need for revenge, the only one who Charles had kept close and allowed to help him on his quest to find the man who had ordered the attack, the one who had taken everything away.

“It's her husband, Isaac Falkinburg,” Jerry said.

Hearing a name attached to the man took Charles' breath away. Eleven years later and he finally had a name. Realizing that he was in

danger of letting his emotions get the best of him, Charles sat back up and took a deep breath.

“And you’re certain that he’s the one?” he asked.

“Do you really think that I’d send her over there if I wasn’t?” Jerry asked. “It’s the guy, Charles. Isaac Falkinburg ordered the attack that killed your wife.”

Another deep breath was needed before Charles could respond.

“Three days isn’t a lot of time to work with,” Charles said.

“Yeah, about that,” Jerry began.

The bondsman paused and cleared his throat.

“I’ve been thinking that you should let me give this assignment to someone else,” he finished.

“What?!” Charles shouted.

“You’ve rebuilt your life, Charles!” Jerry argued. “You’re teaching again, you’re tracking down bad guys, hell, you’re a celebrity.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You’ve got too much to lose now, is all I’m saying.”

Charles stood up and clenched his fists.

“Don’t you dare talk to me about loss,” he said darkly.

A strained silence hung between them for several moments. Jerry cleared his throat and spoke again.

“I’ve got other guys, upstarts and hotshots, they can do this,” Jerry said, his voice softer now. “You don’t have to take this one.”

“Yes,” Charles said, “I do. Forward the information to me, I’ll be leaving within the hour.”

Charles punched his desk hard, severing the communication before Jerry could say anything else. He walked out of his classroom, his mind racing, preparing for the mission ahead.

“Charles, my dear, there you are!”

Even though he tried his best Charles couldn't force a smile onto his face. He turned to see the Dean of the University approaching him. His name was Lawrence Washington III and he had been on his way out when he met Charles three years ago. Covan University was marred by infighting and had split into three separate schools. Lawrence was the Dean of the smallest school and was facing a full staff mutiny, but then Charles had shown up.

The idea had come to him immediately. Charles Bryant was looking to start teaching again, and Lawrence needed a gimmick. He put everything he had behind getting the word out

about the Bounty Hunting Professor. Soon the media was interested, then the students, money started coming in, and all of a sudden Lawrence Washington III was relevant again. He reunited the schools and had turned Charles into the ultimate recruiting gimmick.

“Dean, I need to speak with you,” Charles said.

“Of course, of course, anything for you Charles.”

The man put his arm around Charles and chuckled. Lawrence was much shorter than Charles and while he wasn't necessarily fat he certainly wasn't in shape. What little was left of his hair was combed lovingly over his gaping bald spot.

“An urgent job has come to my attention and I'm afraid I'll need to leave immediately to see to it,” Charles said.

“A bounty hunting assignment?”

“Yes, an important one that’s about to expire. I need to leave within the hour, so someone will have to take my classes for a few days.”

Lawrence slapped him on the back hard and laughed.

“Sounds like a superb adventure!” he said.

“The Bounty Hunting Professor valiantly blasts off into space once more, hot on the tail of another villain.”

The man shook his head and chuckled again.

“Delightful, just delightful. And it’s all sponsored by Covan Unified University, of course.”

Charles forced himself to smile and nod. The University got to use him for all of their promotion and in return they funded his bounty hunting. During those dark days ten years ago

Charles had learned much about the art of bounty hunting and he knew that he could still do it without the funding, but it was much more efficient with a backer. All he cared about was completing assignments, staying sharp until that one important name came across his desk. The name he had learned today.

“Thank you Dean. I’ll be on my way now.”

Charles turned and began walking down the hallway.

“Of course. Go with our blessing,”

Lawrence shouted. “Be sure to take notes, maybe we’ll add this tale into the next volume of your adventures.”

Even though Charles was walking away the Dean kept talking.

“I do believe we’ve got just about enough to collect them all together in one giant edition. Oh, people will just eat that up, don’t you think

Charles? Think of how much we could charge for such a thing!”

Charles kept walking away, his mind already on the job. As he passed an intersecting hallway he noticed Professor Gordon Fay standing there. Fay was the head of the Sociology department and an outspoken critic of Charles'. His appearance perfectly matched his demeanor; sneaky, secretive, scheming. Their eyes locked for a split second and Fay gave his best stare, trying to convey all of his disgust for Charles in just that look. He had overheard the Dean gushing just a moment ago and it made him sick to see Charles heading out once again to waste the University's money on his barbaric side job.

Charles disappeared from view and Fay hurried off in the other direction, an idea on how to put the Bounty Hunting Professor out of

commission for good coming together in his mind.



Penelope Falkinburg walked aimlessly down the sidewalk, unsure of where she was going or why it even mattered. She knew she had been foolish to give her husband so long to come back, but deep down she had hoped that Professor Bryant would be able to help her. Penelope scoffed as she stared at the ground, realizing it had just been another instance of her putting too much faith in someone else, opening herself up to more disappointment.

She had remained on campus after talking to Charles, wandering around in a haze, and now she was outside and heading across one of the ornate courtyards. A large set of stairs opened

up before her and she slowly began making her way down them.

“Why is it that women can never keep their mouths shut?” a menacing voice called out.

Penelope stopped and quickly looked up. Four men stood at the base of the stairs and she knew immediately that they were trouble. These were no students and certainly not teachers, they were criminals, the kind of thugs that resided in the darkest recesses of town. Their clothes were dirty and loose fitting, and they all eyed her as if she was going to be their next meal.

The man standing in the front had a scar across one side of his mouth. He appeared to be the leader of the other three as they all stayed behind him.

“You know, I really thought you were just going to sit around and cry until the six months were up. I thought this was gonna be the easiest

money I ever made. But Mr. Falkinburg insisted we watch you for the entire six months.”

“Isaac hired you?” she asked.

“Yeah,” the man answered, “apparently he knew you were a troublesome gal. He knew you would eventually go for help. And now that you’ve done that, I’m sorry to say that his instructions on what to do to you were quite specific.”

The smile on the man’s face sent shivers down her spine. Penelope felt gut punch over what the man was saying. She was barely coming to grips with the idea that her husband had left her behind to take the fall for him, but the thought that he would hire men to watch her and come after her, it was too much for her to handle. She shook her head and took a step back.

“No, Isaac wouldn’t do this,” she said, tears forming in her eyes. “He wouldn’t do this to me.”

The man with the scar laughed.

“Hey boys, why don’t you show this fine woman exactly what Isaac told us to do to her should she try to track him down.”

The other three men rushed up the stairs towards her. Penelope turned to run but slammed face first into what felt like a wall. She was slightly stunned and looked up to see Charles Bryant standing tall before her. He was dressed in his full bounty hunting gear and looked like an entirely different person.

A navy blue long sleeve nano-fiber shirt clung tightly to his muscled torso. It had reinforced carbon stitching over his ribs, sides and chest to protect him from small arms fire and small blades. He had a long black rifle on

his back and a glistening silver pistol in a holster on his hip. Right at her eye level was his Bounty Hunter badge, the white star emblem displayed proudly on his chest.

“Get behind me,” he said.

His voice was calm but forceful and Penelope quickly did as he asked. The three men paused on the stairs. They looked back down at their leader to see what he wanted them to do.

“Well, well, if it ain’t the Bounty Hunting Professor,” the man with the scar said. “You’re my second favorite mascot, I just want you to know. Brixy the bunny, the mascot from Greer University on Lendell 3, that’s my favorite mascot. But you, man, you are number two for sure.”

Charles didn’t budge. He was sizing up each of the men, scanning their muscle build,

inspecting how they stood for any signs of combat or martial arts training. One of the thugs shrugged as he addressed the man with the scar.

“What are we supposed to do?” the thug asked.

“Kill him, of course. And then grab the girl.”

The three men rushed up the steps. Penelope backed away as Charles stood completely still, watching their every move, planning each of his upcoming attacks. As the first thug reached the top step, Charles kicked him with a perfectly executed front kick. He fully extended his leg and the force of it sent the thug backwards. The man sailed just above the stairs until he was almost at the bottom where he slammed into the final two steps. He rolled back, his head smacking into the concrete.

Charles turned his attention to the other two men. He had already surmised that neither of them had any training and he easily blocked the first punch that was thrown at him. He followed that up with a quick jab to the man's face, just enough to daze him for a few seconds. The second thug lunged for Charles' pistol. It was a predictable maneuver and one that Charles had been expecting. He grabbed the man's outstretched arm and twisted it as hard as he could. First he heard a pop, then he felt the bones crack. He released the arm and the man collapsed to the ground.

Seeing what had become of his friend, the final thug hesitated, unsure if he was better off trying to fight or facing the wrath of the man with the scar at the base of the stairs. Charles didn't give him time to make the decision. He punched the man in the throat, then kicked him

on the inside part of his leg, dropping him to his knees. Charles then delivered a devastating straight punch to the man's face, knocking him unconscious and sending his body rolling limply down the stairs.

Charles whirled around as he heard the sound of a gun being cocked. The man with the scar at the base of the stairs had a pistol in his hand and was aiming it up at him. Charles quickly studied the weapon. It was a much older model and in bad condition, but if it fired correctly and if the man's aim was true, it would prove to be sufficiently deadly.

A shot rang out. The man with the scar screamed as his gun was shot from his hand. Charles turned to see his number one student Sean Varis approaching from across the courtyard. In his hand was a silver pistol much like the one Charles carried.

“Next time you’re late for an assignment I’m going to take points off your grade,” Charles said.

Sean had approached from the side of the thug at the base of the stairs. As he subdued the man and got him into restraints he looked up at Charles and smiled.

“I came as soon as the Dean pulled me out of class and besides, this one’s extra credit. I’ve already filled my quota of missions with you for the year, remember?”

Charles watched to be sure that Sean properly secured the thug before responding. He noticed that one of the straps on the restraints wasn’t secured, but before he could point it out the man ripped them off and rushed Sean.

Even though every instinct in him cried out to go and help his student, Charles forced himself to stay at the top of the stairs. The only

way for Sean to learn from his mistakes was for him to clean them up himself.

This proved to be no problem, as the thug with the scar was no more combat proficient than his three lackeys had been. In just five maneuvers Sean had knocked the man unconscious. From his vantage point Charles had seen a way that it could've been done in just three, but all in all he was pleased with his young pupil's effort.

Sean jogged up the steps and smiled as he saw Penelope standing nearby. He was in full bounty hunting gear, but his outfit had a few more stylistic touches than Charles. He had on a black shirt that was similar to the one Charles wore, but looped around his neck was a long, dark red scarf. He also wore a pair of mirrored sunglasses, but as he had been taught, removed them as he introduced himself to the client.

“Hello ma’am,” he said, extending his hand. “My name’s Sean Varis.”

Penelope shook his hand, a look of surprise on her face as she studied Sean. He was young, just twenty one years old. His blonde hair was cut short and his well structured jaw line was clean shaven, just like Charles’.

“You’re a student here?” she asked.

“Yes, the top student in Professor Bryant’s bounty hunting course is allowed to accompany him on assignments for on the job training.”

“We need to get moving,” Charles said, interrupting. “I doubt these are the only four men that your husband had watching you.”

Hearing it spoken out loud that her husband had set these men on her made Penelope angry. Even though she knew it was irrational she had the almost irresistible urge to defend him.

“We can’t know for sure that...”

“It was your husband, Mrs. Falkinburg. I know that hurts, but we don’t have time to worry about that right now. He’s shown a willingness to do whatever it takes to stop you from tracking him down and a man like your husband isn’t going to leave the job in the hands of four local thugs,” Charles said. “More men will be on us soon, far worse men than these.”

She knew he was right, but she held on to her anger.

“So I guess this means you’ll take the job?” Penelope asked. “What happened to not taking bounty hunting work while you’re teaching?”

Charles fixed an intense stare on her. He knew she was in pain, but right now he cared more about keeping her safe and getting off the planet.

“Class ended forty minutes ago,” Charles said. “Now let’s move.”



Sean and Penelope watched as Charles flipped through screen after screen of rundown starships. They were in a small store near the space docks.

“See any that you like?” the overbearing clerk asked.

Charles paused on a screen and studied one of the starships closely. It was a refurbished holdover from a different age, a dinosaur compared to the modern ships and nowhere near as good as the ship that the University provided to Charles.

“This one here,” Charles said, tapping the screen.

“Oh, very nice sir. These merchant freighters hold up very well, I’m sure you’ll be

pleased with the quality of your new ship,” the clerk said. “And how will you be paying for your purchase today?”

Charles had his University credstick in his hand and touched it to the screen. The transaction completed instantaneously.

“How soon can you have the ship ready for launch?” Charles asked.

“It’ll be ready at dock 97 in twenty minutes.”

He nodded and led Sean and Penelope back out onto the busy street. The area around the spaceport was dense, with vendors in every free spot and drifters and criminals on every corner. It was the ideal area of the city for someone who wanted to disappear, but it also made it easy to follow someone without being seen.

Charles made a few irregular turns down side streets. Two individuals mirrored their every move, one close behind, the other much

further. They were about to pass a seedy bar called Coopersmith's and Charles sidestepped into the door, grabbing Penelope and Sean and pulling them in along with him.

“We're being followed,” Charles said.

“Slight frame, about fifteen feet behind us,” Sean said.

“There's another, burly guy, a pro. He was about fifty feet back,” Charles said.

They took up a spot right beside the door and Charles discreetly pulled his pistol out of its holster. It wouldn't have mattered if he had pulled it out and waved it around, the clientele of Coopersmith's were the type that were unfazed by firearms.

Charles stood rigidly, staring at the door. He counted down in his head, knowing that the first person who had been following them would be coming through in three, two, one.

He reached out and grabbed the man coming through the door and put his gun to his head.

“Have you gone mad?!”

Charles couldn't believe who he was looking at. The man who had been following close behind them was none other than Professor Gordon Fay. His eyes were wide and they stared directly at the pistol that Charles still had pressed against his head.

“Why are you following me, Fay?”

“Remove that weapon from my head immediately, or would you like me to add that to the complaint I'll be filing on you for the regulation you broke today?” Fay asked.

Charles slowly lowered the gun and released his grip on Fay. The man straightened his shirt and took a moment to collect himself, then held up a large book.

“I’ve got you this time Bryant, right here in black and white.”

For years Charles had endured Fay and his incessant complaints, taking them in stride, but he simply didn’t have the time to deal with this now.

“You picked a bad time to play hall monitor, Fay,” Charles said as he looked at the door, trying to time when the second person who had been following them would be entering.

“It’s never a bad time to follow the rules and regulations,” Fay said defiantly, opening the book up. “I’d think a licensed Bounty Hunter such as yourself would know that.”

Fay flipped to the page he was looking for and smirked.

“Of course, after today you won’t be licensed any more. In the University faculty guidebook it clearly states in Section 324,

Paragraph H, ‘while on duty teaching no professor will engage in discussions or behavior related to any other job that he or she may hold’. You broke that rule today, didn’t you Bryant? You took on this new bounty hunting gig right in the middle of your class.”

Charles saw the door to the establishment opening and he sprang into action. He rushed Fay and pushed him backwards, out from in front of the door.

“Hey!” Fay protested.

A burly man with a gun on each hip stepped through the door. He looked to the side and noticed Penelope and Sean.

“Your husband’s very displeased with you,” the man said.

Charles grabbed the man’s shoulder from behind.

“Looking for someone?”

The man whirled around and lashed out with a punch. He was fast, and Charles wasn't able to fully dodge the blow. The man's sizable fist glanced off the side of Charles' head. The two of them faced off, each sizing up the other. With his squatty build and his small, close together eyes, Charles knew right off that this was a Sendoran. The small planet was on the far reaches of the galaxy, and years of inbreeding with their own limited population had proven to be detrimental to the evolution of the humans there.

“It's not every day that I get to kill a celebrity,” the Sendoran said.

Charles ignored him and continued to study the man. He was a soldier turned bounty hunter and he had trained in hand to hand fighting. From his stance it looked to be some sort of

boxing discipline, but there was something off about how he had his feet set.

“What’s the matter?” the Sendoran asked. “You waiting for the holo-news to get here so you can try to play hero?”

Charles stepped forward and jabbed at the man. The Sendoran easily blocked it, then countered with a jab of his own. Charles ducked underneath it. He had seen what he needed to see. His opponent had an injury to his right leg. He kept it too far back to protect it, thus ruining the balance of his fighting stance. Charles lowered his guard, knowing it would get the man to strike.

When the Sendoran punched Charles grabbed his fist and pulled. The man immediately lurched forward. Charles wrenched him downwards, sending the man face first into the floor. He was upon him in a second,

kneeling on the man's back as he grasped at his right leg. Just as he thought, Charles found a tangle of cartilage and muscle on the back of the man's leg. The Sendoran screamed out as Charles grabbed a handful of the injured area and squeezed.

“Let me guess, you got this in the Sendoran Civil War?” Charles asked as he squeezed and turned the injured area in his hand.

“You don't know anything about Sendora!” the man screamed.

The never ending Sendoran Civil War was a touchy subject with residents of that world. Charles smiled and squeezed harder.

“How many people has Isaac Falkinburg sent after us?” Charles asked.

“You really think I'm going to tell you anyAHHHH!”

Charles squeezed as hard as he could, digging his nails into the injury.

“Okay!” the Sendoran yelled. “Falkinburg has set a whole army of thugs, bandits, and Dark Bounty Hunters after his wife and anyone who tries to help her find him.”

Charles frowned. Eleven years of going after Falkinburg and coming up empty had taught him that this was a man who didn't take many chances. That looked to be holding true now, as he was going to extreme lengths to keep Penelope from bringing him back to face his charges.

“That's all I need to know,” Charles said.

He leaned forward and smashed the man hard in the base of the neck with his elbow, knocking him out immediately. Charles stood up quickly and brushed himself off. Fay was standing nearby, staring at him and pointing.

“You’re an animal!” Fay yelled.

“Professor Fay, I’m afraid we’re going to have to finish this conversation another time.”

Charles turned towards Sean and Penelope.

“We need to get to the spacedocks quick or we may not get off this planet alive,” he said.

END OF EPISODE ONE

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