

The Bond Episode Three

“And let me tell you,” Sam continued, “Charles is not someone you want after you. I’ve seen him go after a man like a hungry dog.”

They were all seated around a large table that was filled with an assortment of foods. Sam had invited them to dine on his flagship, a craft he called the Henry Morgan, but Charles, Sean, and Penelope had barely eaten. Charles was focused on Sam while Sean and Penelope eyed the many pirates in the room with suspicion.

“This one time, Charles and I were on this real hellhole of a planet, Orvhoz 4 I believe it was, and...”

“Sam,” Charles interrupted, “I’m sure you know I didn’t seek you out just to catch up on old times.”

Sam dropped the hunk of meat he had been eating onto his plate, his mood dampened by the interruption. He used his gray sash to wipe his mouth and then nodded.

“Yes, yes, of course you didn’t.”

“What can you tell me about the pirate group that attacked us before you arrived?” Charles asked.

Sam hit the table hard.

“Those are no pirates!” he bellowed. “Pirates live by a code of honor, but these men kill and steal without mercy or reason! They’re bandits, at best.”

Charles gave the man a moment to settle down, then spoke again.

“What can you tell me about these bandits?”

Before answering Sam took a long drink from his glass.

“Six or so months ago this big shot crime lord shows up in the area,” Sam said. “He’s got a whole armada of ships and immediately set them loose all over these quadrants. They’ll kill and rob just about anything, but seem to have a real love for Government ships. They slaughter everyone on board, it’s senseless.”

He paused for a long moment before finishing.

“These are men without honor.”

Charles nodded.

“What can you tell me about their leader?”

This question seemed to perk Sam up and far beneath his monstrous beard he smiled.

“Very little. We saw to it that these bandits steer clear of the Gray Buccaneers.”

“How’d you do that?” Sean asked.

“By killing any and all of them that dared to cross our path.”

Sean leaned forward and shook his head.

“Wait, you just killed them? Even if they hadn’t provoked you?”

Sam stared hard at the young man.

“Coming within firing range of the Gray Buccaneers is all the provoking we required after seeing the things these men had done.”

Sam turned towards Charles and held up his hands.

“Where’d you find this kid?” he asked.

Charles ignored the question.

“What else can you tell me about these bandits?” Charles asked.

“They’re clearly well financed, there’s got some impressive tech on those ships of theirs. The few we’ve run across smack of hired guns.”

“Dark Bounty Hunters?” Charles asked.

Sam nodded.

“Some of them. Some are just straight mercenaries, others are merchants. These guys will take on just about anyone as long as they’ve got the leanings of a proper villain.”

“Any physical descriptions on their leader? Anything that may help me identify him?” Charles asked.

“You think it’s my husband,” Penelope said.

She had been silent for the entire conversation and they all turned towards her now.

“You think it could be my husband doing these things?”

Charles was about to respond but she spoke again, cutting him off.

“This can’t be Isaac,” she said, growing more emotional with every word. “He wouldn’t run a group of killers and thieves.”

Sean leaned over and placed his hand on her shoulder.

“Professor Bryant is just investigating all possibilities,” Sean said. “You hired him because he’s the best. Just relax and let him work, he’ll get to the bottom of this.”

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Sam was looking at her and Sean closely, and he shook his head and chuckled.

“What kind of crew are you running with these days Charles?” he asked. “I know you’re the famous ‘Bounty Hunting Professor’ now, but back in the day you wouldn’t be caught dead running with an emotional woman and a kid barely out of diapers.”

Before Charles could respond a pirate came rushing into the room. He leaned down and whispered something into Sam’s ear. Sam nodded and quickly stood up.

“Please excuse me for a moment,” Sam said.

He and the other pirates left the room in a hurry. As soon as they were gone Sean stood up and turned towards Charles.

“What do you think that’s all about?” Sean asked.

Charles grabbed a small piece of food in front of him and nibbled on it.

“If my hunch is correct it’s likely a larger force of the bandit ships,” Charles answered.

Sean paced for a few moments before again turning towards Charles.

“Who is this Sam character anyway? Did you really work with him?”

After a moment of hesitation, Charles answered.

“That’s a question for another time.”

Sean started to ask something else but Charles held up his hand.

“They’re coming back.”

A moment later Sam and four of his pirates returned.

“I’m afraid we must cut our meal short. My men will escort you back to your ship and you’ll be free to go,” Sam said.

Sam turned to leave the room but Charles called out to him.

“There’s something I need to do, Sam.”

The massive pirate leader turned back around.

“What’s that Charles?”

Charles slowly stood up from his chair.

“Challenge you for leadership of the Gray Buccaneers,” Charles said.



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EPISODE THREE – “MEN WITHOUT HONOR”

Professor Gordon Fay sat in his office at Covan Unified University, grading the latest round of assignments from his class. His fingers flew over the keypad as he typed paragraphs of notes on every paper. Fay was renowned for being brutally thorough in his grading process. He spent huge chunks of the day in his office, hunched over his desk engrossed in the task.

The door to the office swung open and his number one student, Robert Kent, rushed inside.

“Do you remember the conversation we had about knocking?” Fay asked.

“But Professor Fay, there’s something that...”

“It was less than a week ago,” Fay continued. “I said, ‘how dare you barge into my office without knocking’ and you said ‘I’m so sorry Professor Fay, it won’t happen again’. You do remember having that conversation, don’t you?”

Kent withered beneath the icy stare of his Professor and slowly started to back out of the room.

“Sorry Professor Fay.”

Once the door was closed Kent knocked on it lightly. Fay ignored the knock and busied himself with grading. Kent knocked again a minute later, louder this time. Fay sighed and stopped typing.

“Oh just come in already.”

The door to the office swung open and Kent rushed inside.

“You’re not going to believe this Professor Fay but somehow the holo-news got a hold of the video cube that shows Bryant and Sean Varis fighting those thugs. They’re about to show it.”

Fay swept his hand across the top of his desk, sending all of the open documents and applications off the display. He then started punching in commands.

“Who do you think gave it to the holo-news?” Kent asked.

“I did, you fool.”

“What? Why? You said we were going to turn it over to Dean Washington.”

The news broadcast sparkled to life in front of them. The blue and green hologram floated above the desk, displaying the large set where the news anchors sat in two high backed chairs. They were finishing up a story about dwindling food supplies on a neighboring planet.

“The Dean would only bury the cube, just like he buried your complaint against Professor Bryant,” Fay said. “But once the world sees what a violent, rule breaking man Charles really is, the Dean will have no choice but to fire him from the University.”

Kent started to ask another question but Fay shushed him.

“It’s starting.”

The camera shifted away from the woman who had just been speaking and focused in on the handsome news anchor who sat beside her.

“In other news, we have shocking footage from the Covan Unified University campus to share with you tonight. Please be advised, this footage is graphic and may not be suitable for our younger viewers.”

Fay was smiling from ear to ear, barely able to keep himself from jumping up and down.

“This is finally it,” Fay said. “Once this airs the world will come crashing down on Professor Bryant.”

The two of them watched as the video cube footage played. It showed Bryant engage the four thugs and even panned over just enough to show Sean fire his weapon. Fay giggled.

“Overseeing a student discharging a weapon on campus? There’s no worming your way out of that, Charles,” Fay said with a smile.

Once the footage stopped playing it returned to the image of the news anchor.

“The man in that video needs no introduction, you all know him as Charles Bryant, the Bounty Hunting Professor. This footage was taken one day ago and shows Professor Bryant taking time out of his busy teaching schedule to rescue a woman being mugged right outside the University.”

“What?” Fay screamed.

The camera panned over to the female news anchor and she smiled and nodded.

“Bryant has one of the highest completion rates of any Bounty Hunter in the galaxy, but it’s noble acts like these that make him a true hero.”

The image of Dean Washington appeared next. A scrolling text identified him as the Dean as he started to talk.

“These events are no surprise to us here at Covan Unified University. Charles is not only a hero when on dangerous missions in the galaxy, but he’s also a hero right here on the very steps of the University.”

The camera zoomed in and the Dean smiled.

“Having him on the faculty here is just another reason why CUU is such a thrilling place to get your education. Where else are you going to go where a real life hero is going to be saving people from bloodthirsty thugs between classes?”

“NO!” Fay screamed.

He slammed his fists down on his desk, terminating the holo-news feed.

“No, no, no!”

He continued to yell as he hit the desk again and again. Kent watched nervously. He had seen Professor Fay angry many times before but never to this level. Fay stood up and stared down at the blank desktop. His face was red and his hands were still balled into fists. He turned towards Kent and the intense look on his face caused Kent to back into the door in an almost uncontrollable attempt to get out of the office and away from the enraged Professor.

“I swear it, Kent,” Fay said through clenched teeth. “I will find a way to expose Professor Bryant and have him brought to justice!”

Fay slammed both fists down as hard as he could.



“You don’t have to go through with this Charles,” Sam said.

The two men were standing on top of the long table, now cleared of all the food and dishes. One of the Gray Buccaneers was tying their right hands together at the wrist with a gray strap.

“Actually Sam, I do,” Charles responded.

The room was filling with excited pirates as they came from all over the ship to watch the duel. Many of them had attempted this very act and had the scars to prove it, and they watched to see if the famed Bounty Hunting Professor could succeed where they had failed.

Sean was standing next to Penelope. He had slowly directed them further back into the crowd. They were shoulder to shoulder with smelly, bloodthirsty pirates. Sean leaned close and whispered into her ear.

“Ten paces back is the wall, then it’s fifteen paces from there to the door. Two hundred and fifty paces down the hallway, two hundred if we’re sprinting, and then we take a right. That’s where our ship is.”

Penelope turned towards him, her eyes wide.

“You think Professor Bryant is going to lose?” she asked.

“A good Bounty Hunter plans for all possible outcomes,” Sean answered.
“Just stay alert and be ready to run.”

Penelope nodded and returned her attention to the two men preparing to do battle atop the table. The strap was secured now and both Charles and Sam were being given short knives to wield with their left hands. Sam leaned forward and spoke.

“I won’t be holding back on account of our friendship.”

Charles nodded.

“I wouldn’t expect you to.”

Sam laughed and pulled on the strap. This caused Charles to stumble forward slightly. The pirate leader laughed and then nodded at his gathered men who were now packed into the room.

“Somebody say go,” Sam said.

Several of the pirates screamed in response and the fight commenced. Sam used his size to his advantage immediately, jerking his right arm back as hard as he

could. This pulled Charles off his feet and towards the waiting blade of Sam. At the last possible moment, Charles used his own knife to deflect that of his opponent and landed back onto the table.

Sam pulled the strap again, this time in a downwards motion. Charles stumbled forward and Sam slashed with his knife, cutting Charles on his shoulder. The pirates erupted into a deafening cheer over the site of blood. Charles tried several different thrusts but Sam parried them all. The big pirate leader pulled the strap again. Charles stumbled towards him and Sam hit him with a devastating headbutt.

Charles looked dazed and teetered on the edge of the table, held upright only by the strap. Blood was running from his forehead and the pirates in the room were in a frenzy.

Penelope grabbed Sean's arm, afraid that things were about to take a terrible turn. Sean was focused on the fight, taking in every movement that each of the men made. He had no doubt that Sam's strength was impressive, but he saw several openings that Charles didn't take. Sam dipped his knife once, but Charles dipped as well, making it appear as if Sam blocked when in fact it could've been a clean stab. Sean shook his head.

"This doesn't make sense," he said.

Sam raised his arm as high as he could, pulling Charles up onto his toes. He then began swinging his arm around and around. Charles fought against the motion at first but couldn't resist Sam's strength for very long. A few seconds later Sam had Charles off his feet and was swinging him around like one would a child. The pirates howled with laughter as they watched their leader dismantle a celebrity right before their eyes.

Sam was growing tired and lowered his arm. As soon as Charles' feet touched the table he sprang into action. He darted forward and Sam raised his knife to defend himself. Instead of attacking, Charles went into a slide, going right between Sam's legs. Once behind his opponent, Charles stood up quickly and yanked up on the strap as hard as he could, causing it to catch the pirate leader hard in his nether region.

"Hwuaah," Sam yelled.

Charles yanked upwards again, harder this time. As Sam's arm was awkwardly pulled backwards through his own legs he went into a forward flip. When his considerable girth slammed down onto the table it shattered beneath him, sending him crashing to the floor. In a flash Charles was upon him, knelt upon the big man's chest with his blade at his throat. The room fell silent and for several long moments all that could be heard was the heavy breathing of Charles and Sam. The two men stared at one another for some time before Sam finally looked away and spoke.

"Undo the strap."

One of the pirates approached and untied them. Charles stood up first, followed by Sam. The room was filling with murmurs but it again fell silent when Sam raised his arm.

"I have been defeated. Charles Bryant is your new leader."

The room erupted. The Gray Buccaneers were going ballistic, screaming at Charles and Sam.

"You were seconds away from slitting his throat before the table collapsed!" one pirate shouted.

His protest was echoed by many others as they pointed out that it was only by the luck of the table breaking that Charles had won. Sam again raised his hand but it took much longer for the room to quiet this time.

"The Gray Buccaneers stand by their code," he said loudly. "Be it by furniture malfunction or by skill, Charles Bryant has beaten me. He is our new leader."

Sam started to remove his gray sash but Charles placed his hand on his shoulder, stopping him.

"We'll have time for a proper changeover later," Charles said. "For now I believe we have bandits approaching, do we not?"

One of the ranking pirates stepped forward.

"The bridge crew has standing orders to engage and eliminate them. The battle is likely to begin any moment now."

"No," Charles said. "I want one of the bandit ships taken intact and the crew aboard it left unharmed."

The room again broke out in discord. Sam shook his head.

“Charles, you don’t know how dangerous these bandits are. The only reason they’ve left us alone is because we’ve made a brutal example of their comrades. If we start showing them mercy it’ll be perceived as weakness.”

“I don’t care. These are my orders and I expect them carried out.”

A muscular pirate came forward. He pointed angrily at Charles.

“I challenge you for leadership of the...”

Charles punched the man hard in the face. The pirate fell to the floor, unconscious. The other men in the room looked at one another, then to Sam. The man let out a long sigh, then spoke.

“Our new leader has given his order. Let us carry it out.”

Even though none of them were on board with the plan they rushed into action, clearing the room and moving towards their battle stations. A few moments later it was just Charles, Sean, Penelope and Sam who remained in the room.

“What would you have me do, Charles?” Sam asked.

Charles patted him on the back.

“Lead your Buccaneers, Sam. All I need is one bandit ship and its crew.”

“Couldn’t you have just asked me to do that without going through the trouble of seizing control of the whole organization?”

“What would your men have thought if a celebrity came in and demanded their fearless leader show leniency to the bandits?” Charles asked. “You would’ve appeared weak, old friend. This way you lost only by the lucky break of a table and have not lost the respect of your men.”

Sam ran his hands through his tangled mass of beard and nodded.

“And naturally when all of this is over and I challenge you for leadership of the Buccaneers I’ll find it to be an easy fight,” Sam said.

Charles smiled.

“Naturally.”

After straightening his sash, Sam spoke.

“Might I suggest we make our way to the bridge. Without direct supervision I fear the Buccaneers may wipe out all of the ships, despite what their new leader has ordered of them.”

The four of them followed Sam through the halls of the Henry Morgan. When they arrived on the bridge they could see on the wall sized viewport that the battle

was nearly finished. There had been twenty bandit ships, but there were only seven still in the fight. The Gray Buccaneers swarmed around them, utilizing team tactics and maneuvers to pick off each ship they engaged.

Charles pointed to a medium bandit cruiser that hadn't been hit by the pirates yet.

"That's the ship I need. Disable it and tow it to us."

The pirates on the bridge all looked at Sam, who nodded. They communicated the order out to the rest of the Buccaneers. Several ships broke away from the main conflict and began strafing the ship that Charles had pointed out. A few minutes later one of the bridge crewmen turned around in his chair.

"The ship's defenses have been disabled. Our men are docking with it now to subdue the bandits."

Sam nodded and grunted. Something in his mannerisms struck Sean as off and he glanced over at Charles, then nodded towards Sam. Charles looked and noticed it too.

"Alive, Sam. I need the men on that ship alive," Charles said.

The massive man crossed his arms and continued to stare straight ahead. The other pirates on the bridge were watching them closely.

"The people on that ship have information that I need and I need it very soon," Charles said.

"Otherwise I'll be heading to trial for crimes I didn't commit," Penelope added. Sam turned and looked at her.

"You're on the run from the law?" he asked.

Penelope looked down at the floor.

"Very soon I will be."

Sam uncrossed his arms and turned towards Charles.

"Now that sounds more like the type of crew you'd run with," Sam said with a smile.

He reached over and slapped Charles hard on the back.

"Give me a moment to speak with my men. I'll make sure that the bridge crew and captain of that ship remain unharmed."

When Sam walked away Sean approached Charles and spoke in a hushed tone.

"Don't you think this is getting a little out of control, Professor?"

Charles looked at his student.

“Sometimes you’re forced to make bold moves in order to achieve your goals.”

“Bold moves?” Sean asked breathlessly. “Professor, you’re now the leader of a pirate organization and are in the process of taking over a ship full of bandits.”

Charles nodded.

“When you’re out in the field, engaged in life or death situations time and again, life as a Bounty Hunter is nothing like the textbooks tell you it is,” Charles said.

“I’m starting to pick up on that, Professor.”

Penelope stepped forward and they both turned to look at her.

“I need to know Professor Bryant, do you really believe that my husband could be the man running these bandits?”

“Now’s not the time, Mrs. Falkinburg,” Charles said.

“I know my husband, Professor,” Penelope said. “Not as well as I thought, but I know my husband. Is he capable of doing bad things, illegal things? Yes. But I’m telling you, he is not capable of leading a group of killers and thieves. He’s just not.”

Charles met her gaze. He saw in her eyes what he had seen in so many other’s. Denial. No matter how high the evidence stacked up, sometimes loved ones just couldn’t see those they were closest to for what they truly were. Charles offered her a slight nod.

“I hope for your sake that you’re right,” he said.

Sam turned towards them and spoke loudly.

“The bandit ship is ours and most of the crew members are still alive. What would you have us do now?”

“Let’s go pay them a visit,” Charles said.

END OF EPISODE 3

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