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BILL SMITH

HUNTING THE HUNTERS

Lord Darth Vader, By your directive, I have prepared a report on the elusive bounty hunter operating under the name of Nariss Siv Loqesh. He is difficult to work with - - even by the standards of other hunters - - but he is also very good at his job. As per your orders, Nariss has been ordered to join the bounty hunters Boba Fett, Bossk, IG-88, Dengar, 4-LOM and Zuckuss in the effort to track down the elusive Rebel outlaws Han Solo and Leia Organa. I'm sure his considerable skills will be of great utility.

I remain your faithful servant,

Major Herrit

Imperial Intelligence

Imperial Intelligence Datafile:

Nariss Siv Loqesh is a very successful hunter with a capture rate of nearly 90%. He has been operating as a licensed hunter for more than a decade, making for an unusually long career in that lethal profession.

There are no visual records of this individual's identity, due to unusual gaps in computer records. His insistence on operating in a full suit of body armor effectively conceals his identity. Tracking back through IOCI records, my agents have determined that this first bounty hunting permit was issued by a local agency on Sperin (Bajic sector). No further data are available.

Despite the mystery surrounding his origins, Loqesh's results are indisputable. He is an expert shot with a blaster. He tends to make excellent use of expediters and informants to gather information. He has never worked directly for the Empire.

Although his current whereabouts are unknown, we will be contacting Nariss through an expediter known as Crote. Crote was last seen on Garnib and is presumed to be on the planet.

It was a hot night, which hadn't helped Bie Breil'lya's mood much. The young Bothan was glad to be inside.

While rummaging through his picket for the room's palmcoder, Bie thought of all the

horrible tortures he would like to inflict upon his first cousin, Tav, for sending him to this miserable world in the middle of summer. He hoped a cool glass of iced chi'ffa would be enough to cool him under his fur.

The only light in the darkened room was the flickering comm. Board. Bie let out a deep sigh as he flung his bag on the couch. He ordered the board to play the message while he reached for the light panel.

Blinking once, the vid display lit up to show a Twi'lek dressed in a hooded cloak. He fidgeted nervously; by the background noise Bie could tell the recording had been made from a public vid-comm. "Breil'lya, we must change our meeting. Tomorrow morning, 0500 hours, at the small cafů on the corner of…"

Click!

Bie whirled at the unmistakable sound of a blaster safety being removed. The armored figure half hidden by shadow leveled a mean-looking pistol at Bie. "You are Bie Breil'lya, of the clan Alya."

Bie raised his hands, his fur rippling staccato-fashion to show his panic. "I can double the bounty you've been promised. My family's wealthy. I'll give you anything to let me go!"

"Indeed, you will."

Blue energy enveloped the Bothan.

Bie struggled back to consciousness. He had been propped up in a chair, his hands restrained by wristbinders. The brightly lit room smelled of servo lubricant and thruster exhaust. Like everywhere else on the planet, it was uncomfortably hot. As his vision cleared, he could see a black space yacht outside the hangar.

The drone of a misaligned power generator pounded in his ears… then he realized that the generator was fine and it was only his head that pounded. Beyond the throbbing headache, though, everything else seemed to be in working order.

"Ah, my furry Bothan friend is now awake."

Bie slowly tracked to the source of the noise, and then fought to concentrate on the figure standing before him. The stun blast's effects were still fairly strong. He didn't recognize the voice, but as he tracked up the figure, he realized that the familiar battle armor and blast helmet were off. A horribly scarred face stared back at him.

"If I was that ugly, I'd put the helmet back on." The alien's only response was to shift

his weight from one leg to the other.

Summing up his courage, Bie stood - - teetered, actually - - trying to be as forceful as possible. He concentrated on controlling the nervous ripple of his fur… calming himself… exuding bravery and determination. “You’ll never get away with this.”

It sounded like he was saying,” Yool neber ged abway wid dees.”

The alien smiled. “You don’ t know how many times I’ve heard that. Now, be a good lad and cooperate, will you?”

With a quick shove, Bie was sent stumbling toward the ship. The alien leaned in close. “Breathing or not, you are worth the same. I would imagine you prefer breathing.”

“Well, Nariss, I can see you captured your Bothan.” The high-pitched but undeniably male voice carried over the hum of the power generators. A short humanoid figure slowly toddled into the hangar. He was a Bimm: essentially human in appearance, but barely a meter tall. This particular figure was dressed in a long black cloak - - unusual because most Bimms prefer brightly colored garments - - but he seemed to have that same insufferably cheery demeanor common to his people.

Nariss - - if that was his real name - - turned. “Once again, I am indebted to you, Crote. This time to the tune of 400 credits.” Nariss pulled a small pouch from his belt and selected eight small plastic disks

“What do you want with this one, Nariss?” Crote asked as he pocketed the coins.

Nariss smiled - - a frightening image in of itself - - and patted Crote on the head. “Sometimes it is best for an expediter not to know all the details, right? This one’s worth a nice sum to a rather generous Hutt… and he’s a tempting target for some of my competitors. He is excellent ‘bait.’”

A muffled “Bayt?” emerged from the Bothan’s mouth. Nariss glared at his bound victim. “I wasn’t talking to you, my friend. Now, please be quiet. You’re interrupting my concentration.” Nariss’ hand drifted down to rest on his blaster to complete the threat.

“As I was saying, he’s bait. There are a few ‘fellow professionals’ I have a personal interest in. The bounty on this Bothan’s head will tempt even them to come after him. And only then will they learn it was a trap set by me. I’m sure most of them forgot about me long ago.”

The Bimm shook his head and chuckled. “A hunter who hunts hunters. Nariss, you are one of a kind. Before you drop this sorry piece of fur off, you’ve been commissioned by

the Empire for a hunt. They want to reel in that spoiled Princess-turned-Rebel and - - get this - - Han Solo and the Wookiee."

"Solo. First Jabba, now the Empire. He has a talent for getting noticed. Who will he anger next, Vader?"

"Actually, Vader is after him. All of the top hunters are in-"

"It doesn't matter. I don't work for the Empire. I work for myself. My hunts. My way."

"But, Nariss… Fett, Bossk and Dengar are already in. If you want to be considered one of the best, you gotta go."

"I am the best, my little friend. If Fett wants to be an Imperial lapdog, that is his choice."

Crote shook his head. "You don't understand. You don't turn down someone like Vader."

Narliss looked Crote in the eye. He hated to endanger the Bimm. And he knew the Imperials would want to question Crote if they thought he knew something.

The little crook deserved better. He'd gotten Nariss out of more than a few scrapes over the years. "I need to finish this. You haven't seen me. You don't know where I am. If anyone asks - - especially the Empire - - tell them I disappeared without a trace. But don't worry. I'll be in touch."

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Lord Darth Vader,

Despite firmly worded warnings, the hunter known as Nariss Siv Loqesh is apparently… declining… the invitation to join the hunt for Princess Leia Organa and Han Solo. According to Crote, his expediter, Nariss hasn't been seen for several weeks.

As per your standing directives, a "locate and detain" bounty for the crime of treason has been posted on this most ungrateful hunter. I have no doubt that the bounty of 25,000 credits will be sufficient to gurantee his capture… and to remind other hunters of exactly where their interests lie.

I remain your faithful servant,

Major Herrit

Imperial Intelligence