



One Night in Caleria

*General Zentru'la*

## 1 - The Rancor's Rest

The swoop engine roared in top gear, wind rushed through Orson's sleek black hair, threatening to tear his tailored jacket apart as the grasslands of the Kasiyan wilderness flashed by in a blur. Occasionally he'd pass a small village, or out-of-town industrial estate in his venture across the continent. The General had warned Orson Trent about using a bright red high-end racing swoop for transport... 'It stands out too much', 'You're supposed to be inconspicuous'. The old man knew nothing of style. Or fun.

As the Caelus sun began to set, setting the sky ablaze with orange and crimson, there was nowhere Orson would have rather been than on the back of a Flare-S at top speed. Maybe in the arms of a beautiful woman. Maybe. This was a pretty fine Swoop.

The spires of Caleria peered over the horizon and Orson glanced down at his map. Fifty kilometres left - ten minutes to enjoy his time on the Flare-S before it was time to get to work. Unfortunately, he was not destined for the leafy greens and classy silver spires for which the city earned its fame, but for Tonfrat, a small, run-down settlement on the outskirts, the kind of district the suits in the high rises pretended never existed.

Orson swerved left and right, putting the Flare-S to its limits, feeling how far he could push the new handling upgrades he had installed the week prior. The buildings of Tonfrat came into view, buildings of that dull duracrete grey in contrast to the shining silvers and viridescent greens of the centre. Maybe, when Orson was done hunting for this Senator's son, he'd pay the bars of Caleria a visit. It wasn't often he came to this part of Kasiya. The girls didn't know what they were missing.

The Flare-S' engines quietened to a whisper as Orson reduced his speed entering the city. The streets became narrow and crowded, discarded bottles and other trash a regular sight. He smelt a strong waft of Death Sticks from a group of youths on a street corner. Heads turned wherever he went, his suit was likely worth more than some of the houses here, not to mention the Flare-S. But it was

the last place the senator's son was seen, so here he was - at The General's behest - with a fat paycheck awaiting his safe return.

Unfortunately, that was about all the information the OSI had provided The General, leaving him in this hive of scum and villainy, with only a small blaster pistol concealed in his jacket for protection and no leads. So where better to go than the cantina? It wasn't long before he found one that looked a good fit, *The Rancor's Rest* emblazoned across the front in flickering neon, but most of the letters were askew and some were missing, leaving *The Rancor's Rest*. The Flare-S jerked to a sudden stop. Orson hopped off and into the bar.

The air was heavy and smoky, carrying that familiar scent of Death Sticks. Heads turned to scowl at the newcomer as he closed the door behind him. Twi'lek women danced on the tables. Patrons on rickety stalls engaged in heated arguments while others sat alone, nursing their drinks, their eyes glazed over with a mixture of apathy and weariness. One particularly loud group near the bar were embroiled in a heated game of Pazaak.

Orson went straight to the bar, and felt an unwelcome gaze boring through the back of his head. The leather stool creaked under his weight. "Ain't seen you in 'ere before." A grizzled Rodian with one cybernetic eye wiped a stained glass with a dirty rag.

Orson eyed the selection behind the bar. There was no Sullustan's, no sparkling wine, all of his usual mixtures were off the table. He was taking too long to decide. "Corellian whiskey, neat." It'll have to do for now.

The bartender reached for the bottle and poured Orson his drink, looking him up and down. "Here you go. Not many asking for the top shelf in 'ere."

"Yeah, they don't seem like the sort." Orson took another sip. "You can tell a lot about a man by his choice of poison."

The Rodian chuckled. "Straight talk is the local brew here, stranger."

Orson leaned in slightly, trying to avoid any prying ears. "I've been hearing a lot about Senator Marek lately. What's the local perspective on him?"

The bartender quickly glanced around the bar. "The senator? He's got his hands

in many pots, and not all of them savoury. Why the interest?"

"Just curious," Orson said with a casual shrug. "I'm new to the area, trying to get a feel for the local views."

"Around here, he's not too popular. Promises a lot, delivers little. Some say he's the reason his boy got snatched — too many deals gone sour."

This was good information. He was on the right track. Nothing concrete, but he was in an area where the senator's son was last seen, and the common people hated the senator. What was he even doing here? What would compel a young man to travel to a place like this, where people hate his father? "Unfortunate about his son."

"Yeah, *unfortunate*," said the bartender, with heavy emphasis. But that would be the last Orson would get out of the bartender, as a young woman with long dark hair and a black leather jacket approached the bar, and the bartender seemed to forget Orson existed.

"PLUS 4! THAT'S 20!" There was a large bellow from the pazaak group as a huge, bald man whose head reflected the lights above slammed a blue card on the table. There was a seat next to him. That seemed as good a place as any.

Orson slid into the empty chair. "Deal me in."

A human with bulging muscles and a scarred face, eyed Orson with visible suspicion. "Who the hell are you."

"The name's Trent... Orson Trent." He put his side deck on the desk

"Do we look like we're recruiting new friends mate?"

"Let him play!" the bald man boomed. "He looks like he's got some credits to spare!" He playfully elbowed Orson in the side and he almost fell off his chair.

"And by the end of the night I'll have a few more."

Cantina-level Pazaak was all the same. Guys with too much bravado who could barely even count to twenty let alone bluff their way to it, especially a few pints in. He could have cleaned house in a few rounds if he wanted, even without any sleight of hand or trickery. But this wasn't the time or place, this was not Kasiya central and the stakes weren't high enough for winning to matter. The girl from

the bar, Cassia, had pulled up a chair and joined them too.

The goal was to win trust, rather than credits, and a few misplaced high bets were his way in. What better way to the poor man's heart than some free cash? He even threw in a round of drinks for the table. The bald man, Grax, seemed particularly friendly towards him, but the scarred man, Kaelen, would take some time to win over.

Occasionally, when the topic of the Senate came up, Orson would gently push the conversation in that direction, trying to get a feel for what people knew. After winning a low-stakes round, he saw his opening. "Did they ever find out what happened to his son?"

"Not that I've 'erd," said Grax, shuffling the deck. "I've 'erd rumours though."

"Anything interesting?"

A solid hand slammed onto his shoulder. Orson dropped his cards, and turned to see the Rodian bartender staring down at him. "Asking about that senator's son again are we?" The rest of the table stopped their chatter to look at the barman. "You seem awfully interested in that kind of gossip for a stranger."

"You some sort of investiga'or?" Kaelen sneered. "Or a senator's agent?"

"Look at 'him!" said the bartender, pulling Orson off his chair. "Even looks dressed for a senate meeting."

This was going south quickly. The liver was open. A swift left body hook and he could reach his blaster. But what would shooting up the bar accomplish? It would just jeopardise the mission. Orson jerked free of the barman's grip and snatched his Pazaak cards from the table. More heads started to turn to watch the commotion unfold and the bartender just said in a low voice, "I think you should leave."

"Fine. I've had enough of this rancor piss anyway." Orson downed the remainder of his drink and walked out.

## 2 - The Nebula's Edge

Orson fastened his suit. The temperature of Tonfrat had dropped a couple of degrees during his time in the Rancor's Rest. No solid leads, but one thing was abundantly clear - this part of town *hated* the Senator. All of them had a motive, the bartender, Kaelen, even Grax, he could see all of them having a hand in the son's disappearance. He kept his right hand hovering over the inside pocket holding his blaster pistol.

A blur of motion behind him grabbed that hand, preventing him from drawing his weapon and before he knew what was happening he had been forced into a dark alleyway. His assailant held his arm behind his back in a tight hammerlock, forcing him further into the darkness.

It was Cassia, the woman from the bar, and she was pointing a blaster at him. Orson patted down his jacket. His blaster was gone. "Impressive. Your hands were over me so much I never saw that disappear. What do you want?"

Cassia threw Orson his blaster back. "I know you're looking for the senator's son. I can help."

"You could have just asked."

"Would you have just come willingly into this dark alley with someone you just met in a bar that threw you out?"

Orson looked Cassia up and down. "Yeah."

"Well, anyway, we're here now. No one ever comes down this way, it's a dead end."

Orson slid his blaster back into its inside pocket. "Why would you help me? I don't even know who you are."

"I have my reasons. It's personal. And his name is Eldin."

"I don't trust people who don't tell me their motives."

Cassia laughed. "Right now, you don't have many allies, and time isn't on your side. Help me, and I assure you..." she unzipped her leather jacket, revealing a tight tank top underneath that did little to hide her form. "It'll be worth your while."

Orson's eyes drifted down her body. Suddenly, this mission became a lot more interesting. "Well, I'm convinced."

"Didn't think you'd need asking twice." Cassia zipped her jacket back up. "There's another bar, The Nebula's Edge. They know something, I'm sure they do, I was so close to tricking a guy into giving it up, but they caught on to me and I'm not welcome there anymore."

"I can relate to that."

"Here's the thing, the Nebula's Edge, they *really* like money. I wasn't rich enough to buy the information I needed. But *you*. You should have no problem in there. It's a two-minute speeder journey from here."

"So I just go there, pay someone and they give up the location?"

"Yes. And make sure you have an escape plan. If you screw this up, they might not let you go as easily as the Rancor's Rest. Meet me back here with Eldin."

Orson could hear The Nebula's Edge before he even reached its street - the heavy bass tones of the music filled the night air. Unlike the Rancor's Rest, the neon sign outside actually worked. The Nebula's Edge seemed to be the epicentre of the nightlife of Tonfrat. Orson kept Cassia's warning in the back of his mind. These people were dangerous. He parked his speeder around the corner and made the rest of the way on foot.

Orson inclined his head respectfully to a large Gamorrean bouncer on the door, promising not to cause any trouble. As soon as he opened the door, Orson was hit by a wave of noise. The live band inside played music with explosive percussive notes and Orson could feel the vibrations through his chest. He scanned the bar, and while it was livelier than the Rancor's Rest, there were more heads huddled together in hushed conversations, not wanting to be heard.

His presence didn't turn heads the way it did previously - the place was so busy no one even noticed him enter. Orson pushed his way through a crowd towards the nearest bar. He scanned the top shelf behind the bar. This was more like it. They had spirits worth drinking.

"What'll it be?" Orson could barely hear the barman over the music. Was it

worth a complicated order?

“The Consul’s Choice Tsiraki!” Orson shouted, hoping he was heard. “Mixed with a Corellian White!” The barman mixed up the drink and served it to Orson, a clear liquid with a faintly sweet aroma. He took a sip of the mixture, dangerously sweet, given the alcoholic content. “I’m looking for information! I have cred-”

The barman put up a hand to stop Orson. “You want that guy.” He gestured to the corner of the bar, where one man drank alone - the only person with a table to himself in the whole bar, the only person afforded the luxury of personal space. He was dressed head to toe in black, with a black hood that obscured his face, Orson couldn’t even tell his species but he was. “They call him The Broker.”

Orson inclined his head in thanks and pushed his way through towards The Broker. Even at this table furthest from the band, the music was still deafening, and Orson still couldn’t see his face clearly even as he looked directly at him. His voice was strangely mechanical, as if he was speaking through a modulator. “You have a drink, yet that is not why you came. Why are you here.”

Orson took a seat opposite The Broker. “I hear you’re someone who knows things. Things about people who’ve disappeared.”

“Don’t waste my time with indirectness. What do you want.”

“Senator Marek’s son. Eldin.”

“State your offer.”

He appreciated the directness of The Broker. You always knew where you stood with such a man - and where they stood with you - so long as you had the deepest pockets. Orson laid a credit chit on the table. “5 K.”

The Broker tilted his head to the side, his emotions impenetrable beneath the hood. “10K.”

“8.”

“Done.” 8,000 credits was more than Orson had planned to pay for the information, but he could just claim it back from the General anyway as mission expenses. The Broker continued. “There’s a safehouse disguised as an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of Tonfrat. That’s where Eldin Marek is being held.”



“Thank you. I’ll be on my way.” Orson got up and turned to leave the bar.

“Take care, Orson Trent.” He spun around to look back at The Broker. “These people are dangerous.”

Orson spun around on the spot. “How do you know who I am?”

“I’m an information broker. Send The General my regards.”

Was that a threat? Or simple well-wishing? Orson had no idea what The Broker had to do with The General, but it was none of his business. He continued towards the exit, but his conversation with The Broker seemed to have drawn some eyes. Despite the bar being even more crowded than it was before as the time grew late, he could feel eyes on him as he exited the bar.

In a sudden feeling of unease, Orson glanced over his shoulder a few paces from the bar. Sure enough, two men dressed in plain black emerged shortly after him, blasters drawn. There was no time to mess around. Orson broke into a sprint down the road.

The sound of blaster shots pierced the night, thundering against a wall as Orson turned the corner. He leapt onto his Flare-S and gunned the engine. The swoop bike lurched into action and another couple of blaster bolts narrowly missed his head as he accelerated. He turned to break the line of sight from the men on foot, but his swoop was not the only engine roaring in the night - three men on speeder bikes appeared in the rearview.

Orson weaved in and out of the labyrinth of city streets to shake them, relying on the manoeuvrability of his swoop to take tight turns at breakneck speed, swerving left to right to avoid blaster fire from the pursuing bikes while buildings flashed past in a blur. These guys were no amateurs, matching Orson turn for turn. Another flurry of blaster fire missed, shattering a window and scattering fragments of broken glass. Orson took a hand off the handlebars, drew his pistol and fired it over his shoulder, but at this speed, his aim was wildly off.

He had no time to think about where he was going, only about keeping his speed high enough and his direction erratic enough to be a difficult target. His driving had taken him in a loop, back past the Rancor’s Rest. He slammed on

the emergency brake, turning the bike on the spot and speeding down a narrow alleyway. It was barely wider than the swoop.

An explosion shook the buildings as one of the chasers failed to make the sharp turn, but two remained. Orson turned right out of the narrow alley and came onto a large road with heavy speeder traffic - the city of Caleria on the right, the Kasiyan grasslands on the left. He slalomed between speeders travelling at a normal speed, their drivers swearing and bleeping their horns as he passed, the speeders still in hot pursuit. They hadn't fired their blasters for some time. No ammo?

Orson actively sought out the pockets with the heaviest traffic - the most difficult routes to follow. He zipped through a rapidly closing gap between two large repulsor trucks, the kind commonly used by civilians to transport common goods. Only one of the bikes followed him through, the other crashed through the trucks in a fiery wreckage.

He swerved left, jumping off the road and into the grasslands. His swoop jolted as the one remaining bike rider hit him from behind. The Flare-S started to drift into a spin. Orson counter-steered to maintain his direction, but lost speed in the process. The bike had gained ground, and was now directly to his left. The rider swiped an arm at Orson's shoulder but missed, his black jacket fluttering wildly in the wind. Orson took a hand off the Swoop to try to push him, but his left arm was weak and could get no leverage. Orson turned into him, trying the same thing again but with the weight of the swoop, but the result was the same. He tried firing his pistol, but the rider ducked under his shot.

Orson adjusted his position, standing on the seat of the swoop bike in a low crouch. He turned back towards the speeder bike, and leapt off the Flare-S, grabbing hold of the bike rider's shoulders. The rider slammed on the brakes with Orson's weight on him, and both men were sent flying over the handlebars and onto the soft grass.

Orson drew his pistol and shot the man dead. His suit was covered in mud and grass stains. That was clean on this morning. His Flare-S had coasted to a

stop a couple of hundred metres away. Orson dusted himself off, got back on his swoop and sped off towards the safe house.

### **3 - The Safehouse**

Orson cut the engine a mile from the safe house, letting the bike coast to a stop a safe distance away. He recognised the building, it was one of the industrial estates he had passed on the way to Caleria. If only he had known - this mission could have been a lot quicker.

Orson crouched in the shadows of a nearby building, observing. The night was still, the only sound the distant hum of the city. He needed a plan, a way to get inside without alerting anyone. Orson crept around the perimeter, observing the movements of the guards and the positions of the cameras. The guards were dressed in black civilian clothes with a hood and carried blaster rifles. Armed only with a pistol, rushing in was not an option; it would be suicide.

As one guard stepped outside the complex, Orson noticed a faint trail of smoke heading up to the night sky, illuminated by the moonlight. He was smoking. Perhaps death sticks. He watched the guard as he casually strolled around, his head down and shoulders slumped. Staying to the shadows, Orson crept up behind the smoking guard and drew his silenced pistol. He fired once, with a low hiss audible only to him. The guard dropped immediately, and Orson rushed forward, catching the body before it fell. He dragged the guard around to a secluded corner.

He didn't want to abandon the suit, but there was no other option. If he was going to move around the safehouse, he needed to look like one of them. Orson slipped off his jacket, using it to cover part of the guard's body and dressed himself in the dead man's clothes. He checked the pockets, finding an ID card with the guard's name and picture. He also picked up the guard's light blaster rifle, more to complete the look than to actually use it, his silenced pistol still his preferred weapon of choice.

His infiltration would only last for as long as it took them to find the body.

Speed was critical. Orson moved towards the side entrance, mimicking the guard's walk. He swiped the card through the reader, waited for the satisfying high-pitched confirmation bleep and he was in.

Unfortunately, this was as far as his intelligence took him - he had no knowledge of the building, where the son was being held or how to get there. On the upside however, any building like this had one room which was clearly signposted, and exactly what he needed: a toilet. Still mimicking the dead guard's walk, Orson patrolled the corridors until he saw the sign to the toilet, went inside, sat down in a cubicle, and waited.

Eventually, he heard the door open. That was his chance. He waited a few seconds before exiting the cubicle, walking up behind the guard that entered. He grabbed the man around the neck, locking in a tight chokehold to prevent him calling for help and dragged him to the cubicle. He threw the man to the floor and pointed his pistol at his head.

"Shout, and I put a blaster bolt through your head."

Orson wasn't the most intimidating man in the world, but a blaster suddenly pointed at your head was terrifying regardless, the guard was wide-eyed, staring at the weapon. "You think they won't hear the shot?"

Orson tapped the barrel of the blaster. "Silencer. Barely makes a whisper. You'll start helping if you want to see another rotation."

"They're not paying me anywhere near enough to risk my life. What do you want?"

"The Senator's Son. Where is he being held?"

"The holding cells are downstairs in the basement. The patrolling guard carries the key."

Orson had heard everything he needed and there was no time to hang around. He switched the blaster to stun and knocked the guard unconscious and closed the cubicle door so they'd take longer to find him. Orson holstered his pistol again, picking back up the rifle to blend in again, and moved downstairs.

Reaching the basement with his disguise still holding up, he found himself

in a narrow hallway lined with heavy doors. There was a chill in the air in the basement. It was quieter, with fewer guards. Orson saw no-one as he walked the basement until he heard someone else's footsteps, heavy, clunking, the sound of heavy armour on metallic floor that was so familiar to anyone that worked with The General. He passed only one holding cell in his travels - that made it easier, Eldin must be in there.

Orson kept low, keeping his footsteps silent as he manoeuvred through the corridors until he was behind the heavy guard. With his helmet limiting his vision and his loud footsteps masking Orson's, it was easy to match time with his gait and creep up behind him. The keys jingled at his hip. The heavy black armour left few gaps for a sneak attack. And Orson lacked a blade. Fighting wasn't an option.

He got to within arms reach of the guard, undetected, and gently lifted the keys off his belt hook. He grasped them tightly in his hand to prevent any sound from the jiggle and slunk back around a corner towards the holding cells.

There was only one person in the cell, a human battered and bruised, that looked in his mid-twenties, with unkempt facial hair and a malnourished figure. "You're Eldin? The Senator's Son?" The man cowered back into the corner. "I'm here to get you out."

"Wh- who are you?"

"Name's Trent. Orson Trent. I've been sent by your father to get you out of here."

"My father?" he whispered, his voice cracked and strained. "Is he... is he alright?"

"We can catch up later. Can you walk?"

Eldin nodded slowly and pushed himself up with great effort. His movements were unsteady, and Orson put an arm around his shoulder to give him stability. They took the quickest path from the cell to the stairs. He had no plan from here, anyone that sees him with Eldin would surely know something was wrong. But the stairs were right in front of him.

"HEY!" It was the last sound Orson wanted to hear. The guard with the heavy

armour approached. "You shouldn't be down here. And what are you doing with him?"

Orson shot at a pipe on the wall with the blaster rifle, and the shot of the un-silenced weapon echoed around the basement. Upstairs would have heard it too. Steam erupted from the hole, clouding the visor of the guard. "Move!" Orson hurried Eldin upstairs, an alarm sure to follow.

An alarm rang through the building, alerting all guards to an intruder's presence, but that didn't tell them where. Orson dragged Eldin towards a pantry he had passed earlier, keeping the blaster rifle raised, scanning all corners for potential threats. As he rounded a corner, two guards in black clothes fired on him. He quickly ducked back around the corner with Eldin, then jumped out and took them both down with well-placed shots.

He ushered Eldin into the pantry, where plenty of large abandoned storage containers were present. Orson threw a large box off a trolley, sending fruits and vegetables everywhere. "Get in." Eldin's small frame was luckily small enough to fit inside the container, and Orson wheeled him out of the pantry.

He encountered another guard shortly after on the way to the building exit, but still disguised as one of them, and now with Eldin hidden in the box, they did not initially recognise him. "Any sign of him?" Orson asked the other guards.

"Nope. But we'll find him. Wherever he is."

Orson nodded and continued with the trolley, towards the exit. As soon as they got outside and Orson felt the cold night air on his face once more, he broke into a run, carrying Eldin towards the Flare-S. "Hang on," Orson said as he helped Eldin onto the bike. "Stay there a second. I'll be right back."

Orson ran to the guard he killed earlier, picked up his suit and ran back to the Flare-S, leaping on it behind Eldin. He wrapped his arms around Eldin's shoulders to reach the handlebars, kicked the engine to life and they sped off into the darkness.

"So, there's one thing I forgot to mention," said Orson as he shifted up through the gears.

“What is it?” Eldin said weakly from in front of him, barely audible over the screeching engine.

“I’m not taking you back to your father.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s someone else I made a deal with. A woman named Cassia. I’m taking you to her. She’ll make sure you’re safe.”

Orson coasted towards the main road when he approached the city. The night sky had become slightly lighter, as the sun threatened to creep over the horizon. The best move now was to blend in, as much as he could on a racing swoop. Following the normal traffic laws, Orson drove back towards the alley in which he met Cassia.

Orson parked the Flare-S and hopped off the bike with Eldin, leading him into the alley. Cassia was waiting for them, in the same jacket as before. Orson shot her a smile, and she smiled back. “You did it.” She opened her arms and wrapped Eldin in a tight hug.

“Thank you, kind stranger, for rescuing my boyfriend.”