

Great Hunt V The Great Hunt Begins

First Move 307

Covenant Runner
Zsoldos system

A slight beeping noise rang out from the cockpit, and Darcy picked up the pace, quickly hopping into the pilot's seat of his freighter, the *Covenant Runner*. He was not quick enough in setting down his cup, however, and spilled some of his drink when his ship lurched out of hyperspace.

"This is the *Concordia*. *Covenant Runner*, please transmit your clearance codes."

"Just a moment." Darcy tapped a few keys on his console, before proceeding to wipe up his spill with his cloak. The YT-2000 banked to the right and began approaching the *Concordia*, a Starhawk-class Battleship that stretched for kilometers across the relatively open space around Zsoldos.

"Please be advised that you've been requested onboard *Sundari* station. Welcome home."

"That is where I'm heading," the boy replied, as he admired the Battleship from his cockpit.

It was an impressive sight; Clan Vizsla had decommissioned large parts of their former military, and now relied on the *Concordia* as a flagship, supported by a few other vessels that were not on sensors right now. They were likely deployed for maneuvers; Vizsla didn't see much action on a grand scale, but with new threats elsewhere on the horizon, it was best to get the crew some practice working together in the new fleet.

"Not joining the others today, *Concordia*?"

"Our turn for watching home," the comms officer replied.

"Well, if you feel like racing some time, let me know. First one to *Sundari* gets a glass of brandy. *Covenant* out."

Sundari Station
Zsoldos System

"Careful with those droids," Darcy instructed the Bothan cargo master at dock three. The teenager had just exited his ship, and was always at least a little suspicious of everyone who checked for cargo. While he never returned to *Sundari* without a full cargo bay, it wasn't the only

cargo bay that was full, and not everyone was onboard with the smuggler's operations. Vizsla was a very free port, but it was best practice to remain careful about some of the things he routinely carried.

"Anything to unload here?" the Bothan asked.

"The blue crates are foodstuffs from Tako and Koda, and there's a few special requests in there that I'll dole out later. The rest is earmarked for Zsoldos."

The cargo master nodded his furry head abruptly, barking out commands to droids as Darcy continued past, making his way towards the briefing room where he figured he was expected.

"Summit-y folks," Darcy greeted the others as he stepped inside a medium room with a table and a busy-looking holoprojector. The projector was displaying an image of Daemunn, the moon of Zsoldos, which Zoron, Kanal and Korvis had fixated upon.

"Darcy," Korvis greeted him with a quick nod. "I was expecting you an hour ago."

"I was delayed by the usual disagreements about how I acquired some of my cargo. Some people just don't know a bargain when they strike one."

"It's only a bargain if both parties agree to the sale," Zoron interjected with a sly smirk underneath his helmet.

Darcy rolled his eyes at that. "It wouldn't be a bargain if I paid," the teenager quipped back. "I had to rush my negotiations when I got the return signal."

"This is Daemunn, the moon of Zsoldos," Korvis began. "And this..." the image shifted to a woman, "is Captain Mar-Vel, who we suspect leads a pirate organization on Daemunn."

"There's pirates everywhere in this system," Darcy pointed out. "We aren't the most exciting cosmopolitan planet in this sector."

"We've received reliable intelligence about the Daemonn Wayists raiding neighbouring systems, including Endor and Ryoone."

"Some of the crowd at Koda Station were discussing them," the teenager recalled. "Have they made any moves against us?"

"They won't, not with our fleet in orbit," Zoron replied. Darcy had his doubts; it didn't make sense to establish a large operation right under the Clan's nose without some kind of plan.

“Is that why the *Concordia* is on guard duty? A deterrent?” Zoron confirmed with a nod before returning to the holoprojector and scrolling through a few more images.

“Hopefully one we won’t need,” Korvis continued, “but our intelligence suggests that these pirates are getting bolder and more influential. They could pose a threat, and they are right on our doorstep. Kanal has been organizing our military forces to prepare to step in and remove this pirate operation, but we need to know more. That’s where you come in.”

Darcy raised an eyebrow as the two Mandalorians, Kanal and Korvis, came around the table.

“Our intel operative has told us they have a decent sized cantina in a small settlement on Daemunn.”

“It’s a nice place, a little wild perhaps but they have access to some very good Corellian brandy.” Korvis and Kanal’s helmets exchanged a glance.

“You’re smuggling the brandy for them, aren’t you?”

“Absolutely not! I would never smuggle brandy for an enemy!”

The Mandalorians stared at him through their helmets.

“Ok, maybe once...”

They continued to stare.

“All right, all right. But I always paid the Clan their cut of my profits, just like every other deal I make.”

“We thought you were just being generous.”

Now it was Darcy’s turn to stare.

“Look, I didn’t know they were enemies. I just thought it was another little town. There’s actually quite a few little settlements here and there on Zsoldos, little family and friend groups. They’re easy to cater for and it helps pay for fuel while I’m here.”

“You could just say you’re here on Clan business and refuel at the space station.”

“Only if I wanted to have my ship inspected every time I came back here. Do you know what kind of things I’m smuggling right now?”

“What kind of things?”

“...Nothing.” The Mandos crossed their arms. “A few trinkets here and there, some brandy, a couple barrels of vreska.”

“Vreska is a risky business, Darcy,” Korvis chided him. “Even the *Godless* is careful not to modify their brandy like that.”

“If it’s in demand, it sells,” the boy replied with a shrug. “Besides, I haven’t been stopped in the core worlds in weeks.” He concentrated for a moment. “I believe I’m expected at the settlement on Daemunn later tonight. They’re one of my bigger customers, so I keep them apprised of my times when I’m making my deliveries. Wouldn’t want them feeling lonely and getting swallowed up by a competitor.”

“Just be careful. We don’t know the true strength of this pirate organization, and you don’t exactly strike fear in anyone’s heart.”

“Annoyance, really,” Zoron quipped in.

“I’ll be safe,” Darcy replied tartly. “If Vizsla’s reputation can keep Nalya the Hutt away from me, I’m sure a rowdy band of pirates in our own backyard won’t cross me. I’ll get some shut eye and let you know what I see.”

“Take someone with you, at least,” Kanal insisted. The teenager was dismissed with a friendly nod. “Are you sure he’s the right one to do this?” the Quaestor asked once he had left the room.

“He can talk his way out of a rancor pit, with the rancor. He’ll be fine.”

Daemunn
Zsoldos system

The *Covenant Runner* slid through the upper atmosphere of Daemunn like a lightsaber through steel, expertly guided by its pilot, Darcy Avarik. The YT-2000 cruised through the atmosphere, skimming underneath the clouds as it approached a small settlement. It was nestled in a marshy valley surrounded by a few mountain ridges, and it never ceased to amaze Darcy with how beautiful the scenery was from up here.

If he had more of a military background, he may have suspected the ambush ahead; the mountains provided excellent cover, and a highly defensible position, but he skimmed through oblivious to the danger.

Deep in her underground base, Captain Mar-Vel watched as the YT-2000 came within range. As expected, the Clan was sending out their little smuggler, no doubt to dig up more information. It was already too late for that; everything was set, all the pieces had been quietly hidden across

the chessboard, and now she just needed to make her move. She nodded her order to one of the console operators nearby.

Two of their defensive ion turrets targeted the freighter and opened fire, catching the engine. Her screen indicated an explosion, and the *Covenant Runner* came crashing down to the surface.

“Where is the retrieval team?” the Captain asked.

“The freighter crashed close to where we thought it would,” the operator reported. “They’ll have it shortly.”

“Excellent. I want it repaired and flight-worthy as quickly as possible. That ship is our ticket onboard the *Concordia*.”

“And the pilot?”

“Bring him in. Hold him with the other prisoner.” The operator nodded as Captain Mar-Vel replayed the footage of the *Covenant*’s capture.

The first move has been made, Captain Mar-Vel reassured herself. Check.

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Denath of Vizsla

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