

Bail's Ordeal, Part II

Bail Solaris stood outside the New Republic Penal Facility and looked up. A large, gray building, looking much like an Imperial facility, he saw that the official insignia were on raised signs bolted to the wall. It probably was an old Imperial facility. He sighed, and strode in.

Inside, he faced a quartet of heavily armored and armed guard droids, whose blaster-appendages raised immediately as they detected Bail's sidearm. A bored-looking bureaucrat sitting at a desk behind blaster-proof transparisteel droned, "Remove your weapon, please. Place it in the receptacle."

Bail carefully removed his blaster, placing it in the basket attached to a retracting mechanism in the wall. He looked at the guy behind the glass. The uniform looked remarkably Imperial, save for the colorful "Hi! I'm Zel" nametag with the New Republic logo. The guard droids were standard issue Imperial, as well, with shiny breastplates, possibly due to sandblasting and re-stenciling logos as well. Zel pushed a button, and Bail's gun disappeared, with the basket into the wall. After a few moments, Zel retrieved it from a similar opening on his side of the protective barrier.

The bureaucrat eyed the weapon suspiciously. "Kind of heavy for civilian use, isn't this?"

Bail rolled his eyes. "It's job related. Run the registrations. It's clean."

Zel's face remained stoic as he tapped a few keys on his data terminal. A small laser turret popped from the ceiling, aiming at Bail's head. A green beam of light scanned the technician's retina, as he tried to keep his eye still. Behind the glass, Zel tapped a button on an intercom. "Bail Solaris has reported in." After receiving a response that Bail couldn't hear, a door slid open, and Zel droned again, "Step inside, remove all your clothing and other items, and place them in the receptacle. Put on the clothing provided for you."

Solaris knew what was coming next. A decontaminant spray, and a body scan to prevent smuggling in contraband. He stepped inside the door, and it slid shut solidly behind him. He removed his clothing, placing his datapads of information aside, putting his recording rod between them. The booth filled with a disgusting stench as the decontaminant spray flooded the compartment. After a few seconds, fans turned on and the air cleared. He put on the prison garb, noting that his old identification number was already woven into the fabric. He placed his things inside another retracting basket, palming the recording rod. "I'm going to get this back, as well as my gun, right?" he called out to the walls.

Zel's voice replied in its monotone, "Your belongings will be returned to you upon your release. Please stand by for contraband scan."

Bail swallowed a little hard at Zel's reply. Release. That meant this was going to be a longer trip than Bail had anticipated. His basket of belongings receded into the wall, and he fidgeted nervously as he waited for the scanner bar to emerge. As it did, Bail noticed that its light wasn't on, and so the scanner wasn't active yet. He quickly set the recording rod atop the scanner, just as it came active.

"Please place your hands and feet in their designated locations," a robotic voice instructed. Bail thought it sounded remarkably like Zel's -- except that it was more lifelike. He placed his hands and feet on the spots marked on the walls and floor of the booth, and waited for the scanner bar to lower and raise again, hoping that the recording rod wouldn't slip.

A few seconds bathed in blinding white light later, the scanner bar raised upward again, heading for its hatch. Bail's heart began to sink as the scanner bar neared its home without turning off. It was just inside its doors when its light shut off. Solaris smacked at the roof of the booth, and the recording rod clattered out through the closing hatch doors.

The wall opposite where Bail entered slid open, and Solaris had just enough time to palm the recording rod again before he was met by another guard droid, weapon-arm pointing right at him. Luckily, there was only one. The droid escorted Bail to an empty cell, equipped with lavatory and slide-out bed. Solaris activated this as the door slammed shut and various force fields engaged, their humming reminding the technician that he was very much at the mercy of his jailors. He checked his recording rod for functionality, and, satisfied with its operation, laid back on the bed to wait. At least the Republic's put some padding on the bed, Bail thought, as he waited the long hours, until boredom overtook, and he fell asleep.

Bail awoke to a strangely familiar scent, and a soft, gentle hand rocking him. "Bail, wake up," a feminine voice called to him through his sleepy haze.

"Gimme five more minutes, Jess..." he muttered, then sat up, whirling to face the form above him.

Straightening up before Bail was the definitely feminine form of Jessa Darkmoon, in the garb of a penal system bureaucrat -- Bail noted that the short skirt revealing her long, smooth legs was definitely not an Imperial carryover. God bless the Republic, he thought to himself. He slowly reached under the pillow and turned off his recording rod, drawing it carefully out of hiding.

"Jessa -- It's been a while," Bail said groggily. "I thought you were Admiral Yaloo's right hand. What the hell are you doing here?"

"Well, you know Yaloo wasn't any kind of idealist. He wanted to be a faceless, nameless officer in the Navy, fighting to uphold the glory of the Empire. Now, he's fighting to uphold the glory of the Republic. Had to change ships, and dissolved the crew, so I decided to enter the civil service. I was going to contact you, but you were a little higher profile, and caught the brunt of the backlash against former Imperials."

Bail grunted a little laugh. "At least this cell's nicer than the one I was locked in before. You working on my case, now, or is this a conjugal visit?"

At that, Jessa tossed a datapad onto Bail's lap as he sat up. "Your documentation, Mr. Solaris, is in order," she said in a business-like voice. "Even your blaster registration was correct. To the letter. You're very thorough. However, due to certain circumstances and protocols, we must detain you for a while."

Bail's face fell into a confused, puzzled look.

"Scan for devices," Jessa called out, and the cell was filled with crisscrossing beams of green light, which eventually settled on the recording rod.

"Contents, one recording rod. No other devices," a mechanical voice called out.

Jessa looked disapprovingly at Bail. "How'd you get that in here?" Bail shook his head and didn't reply. She smiled at him, and laughed a little. "I think I know why you'd want to keep a record of this. Go ahead, keep recording. I was more worried about other sensor devices..."

Bail interrupted her. "I didn't think bug sweepers were standard issue in these cells."

Jessa just smiled. "Neither are knockout gas jets. You've been napping for quite a while."

Bail just shook his head. "I should've known. How long?"

"Long enough for me to be able to tell you this: Shel Abadan has taken the Feorri sector. Your employers are out of power, and your fellow teammates were walking straight into a trap. You were ordered here for your protection. Fortunately, your team made it out alive, but they're keeping a low profile. Even the Pardu. You're going to have to stay here for a bit. Abadan's out for your team. Especially you. He thinks you blew up the station on Narsus V, in an attempt to kill him. He thinks you're behind the Branzet raids, and knows you piloted the Stygia, as well as the speeder bike that killed his flunky, Skabi. He wants you seriously dead, Pooky. So, we've been ordered to keep you safe here."

Bail scowled. "By whom?"

"I can't say. I will ask if there's anything I can do to make your stay a little less uncomfortable."

Solaris thought long and hard. "Is the food in here just as bad as what the Imperials served?"

Jessa laughed a little. "What do you think?"

Bail nodded. "Any good restaurants nearby? I got credits in my stuff ... take 'em out of there."

The bureaucrat just slid the cell door open and strode out. "I'll see what I can do. I'll check in on you later."

Solaris sat in his cell, replaying the recording of the conversation a few times, trying to eke out some clue as to who was keeping him here. He also pondered at something Jessa said.

Pooky, he thought. She hasn't called me that since we were together a long time ago. He continued reviewing until his stomach began to grumble. Just then, Jessa returned, carrying a covered tray, and wearing a clingy red dress that accented her every curve.

Bail's jaw dropped a bit, as Jessa removed the cover of the tray, revealing his favorite dish, and two plates. "I see I bought us some takeout. And I know that dress isn't government issue."

The lady simply smiled at Bail. "I bought the food, don't worry," she said. "And I'm not on duty," she added as she slid the cell door closed for privacy.