

Chateau on the Rock

Planning the Next Move

In the asteroid belt of Narsus System, our heroes conferred in a large pressurized cargo module dropped off by the Narseti merchant Tersetis, during one of his "exotic foods" shipments. (The YT-1300 was situated nearby with R2-X7 at the helm in standby statues. Having an active freighter with that many life forms aboard it might make it an easier target for any sensor sweeps of the asteroid belt.) Bail had been shipped back into Feorri Sector on one of these "exotic food" shipment runs, riding in a large sealed crate designed for holding live animals, and thus suitably adaptable to holding a human and some necessities for a covert journey. Vashti had similarly met up with the group during an exchange on Rujan. Tersetis served as a go-between for secret purchases of equipment, and Jake Dreadmar's barter skills proved very valuable for acquiring on Rujan what Tersetis was unable or unwilling to ship in his freighters.

Initially, the group argued the merits of going directly to Narsus Prime, in the hopes of figuring out where Shel Abadan was acting from, and where the abducted Governor Tebesk-a-Susek might be held. Geluvil was written off as an inappropriate place to look for anything to help fight Shel Abadan. ("Speaking of frigid kitties," said Bail, while discussing what could be found on Geluvil, "how are things with the wife, Zaky?" Zaky did not respond very favorably to this query, threatening to use his force pike as a cattleprod on Bail's posterior by way of reply.)

Branzet was written off as irrelevant as well, with Storm Tower gone. Langoria was ruled out as too dangerous to attempt exploring, given that Rujan sources had reported that it had the Narseti equivalent of a Corellian Corvette freighter in orbit around it, its hold modified to hold a flight of four TIE Fighters.

Bail Solaris, drawing upon his experience as a pilot and former Imperial, noted that Langoria lacks in any sort of defensive planetary shield, planetary defense systems, satellite network, or other useful tools to the defense of a planet against a serious invasion attempt, and that a single freighter and four TIE Fighters would be insufficient to patrol the entirety of space around a full-sized planet.

With some more discussion, the group eventually decided to give it a shot at checking out Langoria, in the hopes that they could draw upon the information that Choma, Zaky and Dreadmar had gained on the planet to help them locate the Moff's secret hideaway, the "Chateau on the Rock" -- and perhaps find something useful therein.

Sneaking Onto Langoria

Bail skillfully orchestrated the Century Hawk's hyperspace jump to terminate near Langoria's moon, such that our heroes were able to glimpse the distant freighter patrolling in orbit and a single TIE Fighter, but were not picked up by sensor sweeps, as they ducked behind the moon. Observing the search pattern of the patrol ships (which were not so creative as to alternate their patterns at regular intervals), they timed their descent into Langoria's atmosphere to a point when the patrol ships would be out of range.

Skimming across the surface of Langoria, ducking into a major canyon, sweeping past cascading waterfalls and the solemn and weather-worn visages of ancient Langorian figures carved into rocky cliffs, the Century Hawk at last came to a bowl-shaped impact crater valley ringed by colossal stone sentinels, with a rock chimney core of some ancient volcano left standing in its center -- and upon that, signs of an artificial structure. Sensors picked up severe interference, hinting why this structure would not be easily detected from space.

Bail picked a likely-looking outcropping to attempt to set the ship down on, but he and Vashti drew upon their knowledge of physics (and, in Vashti's case, geology) to determine that the outcropping's mineral composition was such that it probably wouldn't be able to support their weight. In fact, upon closer inspection, they found that it had been broken off by an attempt by another YT-1300 to land in that very same spot -- and the ferognaw-chewed wreckage of the freighter could be seen at the base of the rock chimney many meters below, hinting at the fate of the treasure-seekers that our heroes had heard rumors of back on Rujan (namely, that they had gone off to Langoria ... and never returned).

With a bit more searching, Bail found a slot in the side of the rock chimney that housed a docking bay of sufficient size to hold the Century Hawk, while Vashti returned to a game of holochess against her not-so-bright ASP droid (who was busily deciding ... rook ... or pawn? rook ... or pawn? rook ... or pawn?). However, as he was guiding it in, a couple of defensive turrets popped out of the ceiling and floor of the hangar. Choma, who was sitting in the top gunnery turret (which Bail had powered down, so that trigger-happy Choma wouldn't fire at anything impulsively), saw the top turret pop out and aim directly at him, whereupon he shouted out to the others a warning.

Gundarks in a Barrel

Zaky threw himself into the bottom gunnery station, but miscalculated the effect of the shifting gravity plates along the access tube, and ended up tumbling to the base of the chair, rather than neatly hopping in as he'd planned. Bail was quick to react, powering up the turrets, then doing a heroic but less-than-perfect spin of the ship into the dock, so that its engines ended up facing away from the turrets, but ended up smashing the starboard-offset cockpit against the wall of the dock in the process. (The Century Hawk, a fairly standard YT-1300, was not equipped with shields, so this resulted in fairly significant damage, including shattering the cockpit windows.)

In the ensuing chaos, the YT-1300 set roughly down, the turrets opened fire on the now stationary craft, and fires erupted throughout the ship. R2-X7 used its built-in extinguisher to put out flames in the forward instrument area, while Karl Sturmzwulf -- keeping an eye on the engineering station -- hastily pulled breakers and threw switches to shut off all nonessential systems in order to prevent any explosions or massive failures. The turrets mercilessly blasted apart the cockpit, tearing it open just shy of vaporizing Bail Solaris and Jake Dreadmar, who sat stunned in the now open-to-the-air remnants. Choma managed to fire off some shots at the topmost defense turret, but it targeted his station and blasted it apart, causing the gun to explode and showering Choma with shrapnel. Another volley of turret blasts pummeled the Century Hawk's sensors and instrumentation in the bow of the craft, and another hit the port escape pod, causing it to malfunction and launch out, smashing into one wall of the dock. Zaky managed to get himself into a gunnery pod, but was having very little luck in managing to target anything at such awkward quarters, with the ship being set down on the docking bay floor.

Vashti unbuckled herself from the ship's acceleration couch, and rushed back to engineering, desperate to find out what was happening, and what to do about it. Karl coolly shut off power to the now-destroyed top turret, released his restraints, and headed out to the now-vacant port escape pod module, opened the bulkhead hatch, and leaned outside, taking shots at the topmost turret with his Stormtrooper One blaster rifle. Bail leapt from the remains of the cockpit, taking cover in the shrapnel now littering the floor, while Dreadmar took shots from his now-open vantage point. In the ensuing firefight, our heroes' efforts hindered by the fact that these defensive turrets were heavily armored, they managed at last to damage them sufficiently to put them out of commission, and thus end the mayhem.

And then, Vashti's ASP droid finally decided, took, and moved the holochess piece.

The crew assessed the damage, which was fairly severe to say the least. At first, R2-X7 was directed to start working on repairs, at which point the astromech took a break from extinguishing fires to warble an electronic moan at the impossible task, but then it was decided that the astromech would be better off doing self-repairs and powering down to conserve its energy for an eventual escape attempt.

Entering the Estate

The group assembled at the doors leading from the bay into the interior of the complex, lining up on each side, while Zaky checked for security systems, and found none. When they finally opened the doors, they revealed a tall interior central chamber dominated by a central column with an observation deck, retracted catwalks branching off to various side-chambers, and an extravagant display of accumulated wealth in the form of a sealed environment, complete with colorful reptilian fliers imported from the Core Worlds, waterfalls, vine-covered nooks containing statues and other relics, a simulated environment, and a sheer drop to the bottom (as the catwalks, true to Imperial architectural standards, lacked any handrails).

Zaky and Choma were first to step inside, and were utterly surprised by six hovering defense droids located just inside the door, off to each side of the catwalk, patterned after the Mark IV Patrol Droid, but equipped with blaster pistols. Choma was hit by several stun blasts, and fell headlong off the side, but Zaky managed to escape harm, and managed to grab his brother by the tail, while their fellows provided covering fire. Our heroes combined their fire on the hovering droids, taking them out one by one, with Zaky finally pegging one with his slugthrower once he'd managed to drag Choma back up onto the catwalk. Once the smoke cleared, and Choma recovered, the group figured out how to extend the catwalks to the center area, and gathered there, taking advantage of several comfortable couches ringing the central platform.

Zaky found that a control panel there allowed access to the other catwalks, and even allowed the central platform to rise or lower, and managed to bypass some security measures meant to defend against unwanted intruders such as himself. Choma just took a much needed rest after getting shot up so many times in such a short span of time. Dreadmar went rappelling off the side of the platform, to reach one of the defensive droids that had gotten caught in the side during its downward spiral, and with some help of the others, managed to get its remains pulled to the top, and salvaged its droid brain ... which might be useful later for putting into the Federation Droid Fighter sitting in the hold.

The others took up positions watching the surroundings for any new threats, while Zaky lowered the platform to presumably a new and interesting place to explore. As he did so, the terminal unexpectedly asked for a new password, and he struggled to come up with one on such short notice. Meanwhile, a silvery orb rose from the center of the fountain, unnoticed by any save for Vashti's ASP droid and Choma. While the ASP droid tapped Vashti on the shoulder to get her attention, Choma acted quickly, slicing at the orb with his blade ... neatly cleaving the head off of the water-sealed, chromium-plated server droid that was rising from the fountain like a poised statue, and sending the head flying toward the back of Zaky's own head, impacting it, then landing in Zaky's lap -- much to the slicer's surprise and alarm. Zaky at last, however, was inspired to come up with a password, drawing upon his own knowledge of Langorian history and one of the local landmarks, and managed to satisfy the security system.

Private Office

The platform came to a stop at the bottom, as a catwalk led off to Moff Jerjeran's private office. Choma decided to take this time to rest, while Zaky and Bail worked on trying to put the server droid back together. Vashti, Karl, Jake and the ASP droid (acting as a scout) explored the office, finding no traps, though their arrival prompted the lights to turn on, and music to start playing. At Moff Jerjeran's desk, they found several datapads in disarray, hinting at a hurried exit, and found among them several useful entries, with such titles as "My Insurance Policy", "Go-Bag Check List", and an assortment of codes and back-door arrangements (and details thereof) that Moff Jerjeran had apparently rigged in the event that he might be betrayed by the ambitious Shel Abadan.

Bail and Zaky got the server droid functioning again, tastefully tying a ribbon around her neck to cover the unsightly vibroblade damage, and fumblingly tried to explain that they were there on behalf of Moff Jerjeran, trying to rescue him. The droid was somewhat reluctant to divulge all the information they wanted, however, wanting a password given by Jerjeran. They stalled for time, while Zaky tried to figure out a likely password -- and the droid was distracted by giving Bail a very boring tour of the bits of artwork on display in Jerjeran's office. Vashti and Karl revealed their findings to Zaky, however, and in the passcodes they found one that could be given to the server droid to ensure her cooperation. They did so, and then proceeded to investigate the manor for anything they might put to good use.

Jackpot

In the ensuing search (and looting), they found a number of minor treasures that would be easily converted into liquid assets, and they also found an accessway down to the surface, so they could ransack the crashed ship at the bottom for spare parts. Using a considerable amount of jury-rigging, they managed to get the Century Hawk into such condition that they could actually get it into orbit minus a proper cockpit, and fly it by instruments from the forward section. They also managed to salvage four of the other defensive droids, and found some medpacs and a few weapons in the manor that might be of use.

Managing to slip past the patrol once again, the Century Hawk made its way to Rujan, where they sold off several valuables quickly, and made arrangements to get some rushed work on the ship to replace its cockpit -- and to install the shield generator and the turret salvaged from the wrecked ship. They also went on a shopping spree for their new droids -- They installed one droid brain in the droid fighter, and managed to acquire a load of energy torpedoes for its launch tubes. For the defensive droids, they got the requisite parts to refurbish them, and upgrade them considerably, armoring them and giving them more useful weapons and vocabulators. In a bizarre twist, they used modified Stormtrooper helmets to encase the tiny robots, mounting the guns through one eye hole each, and -- for an added touch -- suspended cloaks from the bottom of each hovering droid.

With a number of passcodes to bypass the security systems of the Oppressor (Shel Abadan's gunship) and the location and more codes for an Imperial stronghold underwater on Narsus Prime, our heroes began to plot just how they might assault this underwater stronghold with their new "army", in hopes of rescuing Governor Tebesk-a-Susek and other political prisoners, and perhaps even taking on Shel Abadan himself ... and whatever mysterious Dark Jedi might be in league with him.