REBIRTH

The exhausted figure, tattered and bleeding, limped painfully into the city of Wayfar. The people of the small desert community quickly scuttled away to the shadows at his approach. There was almost nothing left of the Mandalorian armor, save for a few battered pieces and the tell-tale helmet. He held his right arm in agony as he searched for a suitable shelter. Slowly kneeling down in the darkened archway of a shop that was no longer in business, he felt sharp pains shooting through his entire body. All in all, he was lucky to be alive...

Flying out would have been easier, but that would have left him impaled on one of the Sarlacc's many teeth, so he had to leave his jet pack behind. Blasting through the sidewall of the Sarlacc's belly had been his only option. The resultant flow of acidic juices had found the unprotected areas of his armored suit and burned clear through to the skin. He then had to burrow his way out of the smothering, burning sands, chafing much of his body and inflaming his wounds. Then, a full days journey on foot through the sweltering heat and endless dunes. Had he docked at Mos Eisley or Anchorhead, he likely would have died in the deserts of Tattooine before reaching his ship.

He had to get moving. Though the rebels probably figured him for dead now, they were aware of his presence, and likely had designs on confiscating his ship. He eased his way back up to a standing position and slowly headed towards the landing platforms.

* * *

He'd arrived too late. The bounty hunter watched from the shadows of a nearby garage as rebel troops crawled and picked their way over his ship, the *Slave I*. They hadn't yet breached its interior, which wasn't surprising since its owner had installed

several security and anti-intruder devices. Even if they did find a way in, Boba Fett took comfort in the fact that, should the proper command codes not be entered, they would all be sprayed with a lethal dose of Lissian gas. But he wasn't taking any chances. The *Slave I* was too highly modified and many of its components were custom built. Likely they would airlift it out and disassemble it, piece by piece, in the landing bay of some rebel cruiser. He had spent years tuning its systems to perfection and he wasn't about to let some rabble tear it apart!

But, for the first time in his life, Boba Fett was helpless. He had lost his custom blaster rifle to that self-proclaimed Jedi Knight, Luke Skywalker, and used all of his wrist-rockets on the pack of Sandpeople that had attacked him on his trek back to Wayfar. The pain in his arm made him realize that one of those Sandpeople had no doubt broken his arm with their metal gaffi sticks. He looked into his belt pouch: a single thermal detonator remained. Not enough to take them all out, but maybe enough for a distraction.

"Hey! Who are *you*?" yelled a voice from behind him, in a gravelly version of Basic.

Boba Fett whirled his head around to see a nasty looking mechanic. He was human, with dirty, wiry hair. He approached cautiously, still rubbing his hands with an oily rag. Boba Fett looked around quickly for a tool of some sort that he could use as a weapon. He knew this guy was going to get spooked and yell for help any second now. He had to shut him up.

The bounty hunter grabbed a nearby hydrospanner and lunged at the mechanic. The greasy human was able to get out a squeal before Boba Fett thrust the metal tool into his throat. The mechanic fell to the ground and was still. Boba Fett whirled to see if the troops were still in place: they weren't. Two of the rebel soldiers were on their way to investigate the strange noise. Squinting in the light of the twin suns of Tattooine, they still couldn't see into the shadowy garage. Boba Fett had no choice. He turned and began to run as fast as his injured body would let him.

He reached the rear door of the garage just as the two troops saw the body of the dead mechanic.

"You there! Halt!" one of them shouted. He raised his blaster pistol and fired, the shot bouncing off of the door that had just closed behind Boba Fett.

Boba Fett ran down the small alley, frantically looking for a place to hide. There was a small ladder leading to the rooftops of the shabbily built buildings that were the town of Wayfar. But he didn't have the strength to go jumping from rooftop to rooftop, and his broken arm made it even more unlikely. He kept running, turning left, then right, always staying one corner ahead of the pursuing troops. Then, he stopped. He was at a dead end, with nothing but a few small, empty storage containers to hide behind. He quickly piled them together and attempted to scale the shoddy wall. He screamed in pain as he hefted himself up on to the wall. It was all he could do just to roll off and fall to the other side.

*   *   *

The two rebel soldiers rounded the corner to come face to face with the empty dead-end alley. They had expected to have him cornered and were ready to fire, but there was no target to fire at. Then they saw the makeshift pile of storage containers.

"You go around front. I'll stay here in case he doubles back."

The second trooper ran off, in hopes of finally trapping this notorious bounty hunter. It would be one less enemy the Empire had to work with, and free agents like this one were always the most dangerous. He might even get a promotion...

He followed the side alleys around to find that they came out on the main street. Which meant the bounty hunter could be anywhere. It was unlikely that he could blend into the crowd, so he probably would have ducked inside a nearby building. The rebel soldier went left...and came face to face with a rearing dewback. It had come from behind the adjacent building and the doomed trooper caught a quick glance of Boba Fett riding on its back,

working the reins. He fumbled with his blaster, trying to bring it to bear on the beast. But it was too late. The massive creature dropped down, landing squarely on the soldiers chest, crushing him. Boba Fett looked at the body with satisfaction, then casually guided the dewback in the direction it had come from.

*   *   *

The first soldier was still waiting, anxiously, in the alleyway when he heard the commotion. It sounded like a roar, a scream, and a sick crunch. He wasn't sure what it was but he knew it had happened just on the other side of the wall. He crept up to the wall and gently climbed onto the storage containers. The trooper cautiously peered over the wall...and was staring at the face of a massive dewback. The dewback roared and the soldier screamed. In his fear, he lost his balance and fell off of the storage containers onto the hard, dusty ground. Quickly, he got to his feet and ran back down the alleyway. He barely noticed that he had dropped his gun. He didn't go back for it.

*   *   *

Boba Fett watched as the cowardly rebel disappeared down the alley. It was just his luck that he had landed squarely on top of the dewback after falling off of the wall. It had been quite some time since he had ridden one but it all came back in a flash. Dewbacks weren't carnivorous, but that didn't make them any less fearsome.

Pulling the reins, he guided the animal towards the outskirts of town. He'd keep it for protection until he found a safe, defensible place to hide. He hoped the Empire wouldn't mind. He wasn't out of this yet...

To be continued…