

Star Wars

Galaxy Magazine

N 5

Double Cross on Ord Mantell

by Michael Mikaelian;

Illustrated by Walter McDaniels and Shawn Martinbrough

sended by Andres Lescano

uploaded 03.IX.2005

updated : 11.XI.2006

#####

The polluted atmosphere of Ord Mantell casts strange hues across its surface as the sun sets on another dreary day. A black vessel slowly descends from the sky and lands in a dilapidated hangar bay. From the vessel, a Corellian transport, a walkway is lowered, and a lone figure disembarks. A small group of locals looks on, but one glimpse of the ominous being sends them scurrying. That's not an unusual reaction to Cypher Bos, a notorious bounty hunter. Indeed, the entire Nalrithian species of insectoids is generally feared throughout the galaxy.

Cypher strides through the streets of Ord Mantell, his mind focused on his destination. He parts the sparse foot traffic with his very presence. As he approaches a pair of Chadra-Fan, he can sense their fear. The bat-like beings exude a scent that echoes the terror on their faces. Cypher grins, obviously proud of his ability to inspire fear in others.

Cypher has come to speak with a Chadra-Fan named Baajik, a secret double agent for either the Rebels or the Hutts, whichever side serves his immediate needs. For now, at least, he's working for the Rebels. As the two scurry away, Cypher realizes that neither of them matches Baajik's description.

As Cypher turns off the main avenue onto a dark side street, he's being watched by a robed figure whose features are hidden under a heavy hood. The figure isn't tracking Cypher. He already knows that the Nalrithian is headed for the Drunken Bantha, the only place worth traveling this way for because it's the place to find out anything worth knowing on Ord Mantell.

With dusk quickly approaching, the robed figure has no trouble hiding from the Imperial stormtroopers who march past the alley. He waits for them to go by, then warily continues toward the Bantha. As any good Rebel knows, getting caught now would surely lead to his execution. After all, he is carrying stolen information about an Imperial shipment of credits. The Rebellion plans to intercept the shipment and use the funds to outfit its new secret base on Hoth.

Even so, the mysterious Rebel isn't nearly as concerned with the stormtroopers as he is with Cypher Bos. He's certain Cypher is here also seeking credits, though in the form of Imperial bounties on Rebel spies.

The Drunken Bantha is teeming with activity as a myriad of species chatter in many languages, putting another day of dread behind them. The robed figure spots Cypher, sitting in a dark, secluded corner, speaking to Baajik.

"What is this?" the cloaked Rebel hisses to himself, incredulous that he's being sold out by Baajik - - one of his own agents! The Rebel's hood falls away from his face enough to reveal his Nalrithian insectoid features.

There is a mental link shared by Nalrithian eggmates that allows them to think and act as a single entity. The link's range, though, is limited to no more than a dozen meters. For the last 20 minutes, Phoedris Bos - - the robed Rebel - - has managed to suppress the thought link between himself and his eggmate, Cypher Bos. But now the shock of Baajik's betrayal has broken Phoedris' concentration, and his one powerful thought - - "No! - -

reverberates across the Drunken Bantha.

Of course, Cypher immediately detects the panicked presence of Phoedris and recognizes his eggmate's fear. He's sensed it twice before - - while hunting down their other two eggmates. Compared with Phoedris, however, they were rather poor game and not much of a challenge. Phoedris is more than clever enough to evade Cypher indefinitely, yet now his allegiance to the Rebellion has given away his whereabouts. Perhaps the two might have even teamed up, Cypher thinks, but then quickly reminds himself that bleeding-heart Phoedris would never have gone for that.

With less grace than usual, Phoedris pushes past the throng of pirates and smugglers. He tries to persuade himself that Cypher did not detect his mental outburst, knowing, though, that the chances are slim. Phoedris' outrage was so intense, it could have traveled a kilometer between eggmates.

Once outside, Phoedris is tempted to run, but catches himself, remembering the stormtrooper patrol. Rather, he backtracks several blocks, toward the Rebel hideout, nervously clutching his blaster... just in case.

Suddenly, a blaster shot beams from the shadows and catches Phoedris on the shoulder. If it were not for his flowing cloak, the shot would have landed in the center of his chest. The pain is still excruciating as Phoedris turns, expecting more fire. Instead, he is tackled and wrestled to the ground by his attacker - - Cypher. The air crackles with energy as the eggmates struggle, physically and mentally.

"I hope you understand, brother, that your death will serve a greater cause," Cypher shouts telepathically. "The Rebel dogs will never suspect that I have taken your place among them."

Both eggmates feel the pain of Phoedris' wound as they fight, but Cypher has planned well. "I have prepared for this with cybernetics," he tells his dying brother. "The wound is a mere tingle to me, while it bleeds you of your life."

The struggle is short. As Phoedris' lifeless body slides to the ground, Cypher unemotionally rips his eggmate's cloak free and fastens it around himself. He also possesses all of Phoedris' knowledge, skills and memories - - including the secret location of the Rebel hideout. Still, there is one element missing from his plan to single-handedly bring down the Rebellion as Cypher heads toward the hideout.

He noiselessly enters through a secret doorway into the heart of the Rebel Alliance's intelligence headquarters on Ord Mantell. His motions set off a humming sensor, alerting the two Rebels in the dimly lit room ahead. Not wanting to alarm them, Cypher quickly steps into the light and draws back his hood. "I have the information we need regarding the Imperial shipment," he says. "There should be more than enough credits onboard to pay for the Hoth base." With all of his eggmate's memories, Cypher continues to recite the details of the mission.

A moment later, the sensor hums again as Baajik enters the hideout. He immediately sees the Nalrithian, although he is not fooled by the mere change of clothing. His heightened senses tell him that this is not Phoedris before him. Baajik draws his blaster, but Cypher reacts and fires first, knocking the small bat creature backs into the darkness, where he falls into a smoldering heap. With his last gasp, Baajik whimpers, "Cypher Bos..."

"He must have mistaken me for my brother, Cypher Bos, the bounty hunter," the murderer says, laughing to himself as he continues his charade, and tries to look concerned. "But Cypher ambushed me on my way here. Fortunately, I blasted him and escaped."