

Life According to Meelo

By August and Cynthia Hahn

Dark times have come to Cularin, but not all light is drowned in the deepening shadows. There are still places on the lush green world where adversity is met by laughter, hardship is countered by strong friendships, and no amount of emotional turmoil is a match for the power of the Human (or alien) spirit.



In the streets of Gadrin, Cularin's largest city, there is a cantina called the Crosstown. It's a haven for the war-weary, a home away from home for those without one to begin with, and a rest stop for all manner of travelers and vagabonds. Trouble-makers rub elbows with politicians, and mercenaries match yarn-spinning skills with the most stoic of Jedi. All the while, the eclectic clientele prove one universal truth -- there is no tragedy so terrible that it cannot be chased away with good company and some cutthroat card playing . . .

It was the bottom of her fourteenth hand, and Meelo was having trouble caring about much of anything any more. After playing that much sabacc, all she really wanted to do was crawl in a hole and nurse her wounded credit account. However, the prospect of quitting while losing for a Rodian is rather like being hit in the face repeatedly with a gaffi stick -- only not nearly as pleasant.

"So where was I?" she asked as eloquently as her tired mind could. Still, her rapt audience at the card table could make her out well enough.

It was a Bimm that finally answered, having puzzled through her sleepy words enough to understand the question. "You were telling us how you founded the Wookiee Liberation Front."

She stared at the speaker like he'd grown an extra limb. "Is that what I said?" For the life of her, she did not remember bringing up the topic. It was a sore subject for her; it was definitely not the kind of thing to talk about in mixed company -- or anywhere, really.

Everyone over at the bar nodded, save for a single robed figure seated at the end. He spoke up quietly, saying only, "Actually, she said she was there when the Front was founded."

Meelo sighed; perhaps it was finally time to reveal the origins of the WOLF before things got any more out of hand. Trying to save face, she straightened up and tried to look noble. "Exactly. That's what I said."

The Bimm sighed and shot the robed Human a withering glare. "Hush! I want to hear the rest of this! WOLF has done a lot for my big furry cousins; I want to know who started the movement."

Meelo snorted, a rude sound that was only exacerbated by her exhaustion. "WOLF? Bah! Okay, okay . . . deal me into another hand, and I'll tell you everything."

A quick shuffle started round fifteen, and Meelo ordered a concoction of fruit juices and Tarasin plant extracts to jump start her neurons. It tasted like a stagnant pond scum, but it had the kick of four cups of caf. After a few minutes of gasping for breath and tearing up, she was ready to talk again.

"Okay . . . so there we were, sitting in this speeder and staring at the Metatheran Cartel building downtown. You know, the one that's burned down and abandoned now? Well, we were there because a friend of ours was caught snooping into the Cartel's records, and we thought he was being held inside. Knowing what those little pigmen are capable of, we feared the worst. No time to call in OPS; we had to save him ourselves.

"We'd already tried the subtle approach, but my Jedi friend was about as tactful as a Krayt Dragon. After bungling everything from hello to flirting with the secretary, we were thrown out on our ears before we could so much as scope the security cameras. Aside from the blast door in the back of the office, we'd come up with nothing. Plan A was a big, fat wash.

"So we were all trying to come up with Plan B. Our professional scrounger was no help, the Jedi was still blushing, and our Wookiee was as clueless as ever. He was just jamming down on the speeder's pedals, pushing back against the driver's seat, complaining about the lack of room."

"Wait," piped up the Bimm. "So the Wookiee was with you? He wasn't the one held captive?"

Meelo looked at the diminutive interruption so crossly; he fell silent instantly.

"As I was saying, the Wookiee was being less than useless, as usual. So all of the sudden, the vocoder box on the blast helmet next to me chimes in with, 'I say we smash the speeder into the front doors, leap out before everything explodes, and slip in during all the confusion!' Of course, the blast helmet belongs to Keth-Keth, the most annoying Jawa on the face of Cularin.

"So we all veto his idea immediately as being both irrational and insane, not to mention illegal on so many levels. With nothing else constructive to add, he shuts up and gives us all some peace. If that peace had lasted a little longer, maybe we could have avoided what happened next."

There was a chortle at the end of the bar from the robed figure. "Peace never lasts. Silence is only the brief pause between gunshots."

Meelo nodded again. "Exactly. So we're all thinking of how to get into the Cartel's headquarters and get our friend out when our Twi'lek scrounger says, 'We've been made! Two swoops behind us, coming up fast!' I tried to look back to see if it was a real threat or another of that tendril-head's paranoid delusions when our speeder lurches forward.

"Two things you gotta know about Roorrrwiir. One, he's the twitchiest sentient I know. He panics at the drop of a hydrosponder and is as likely to fly into a rage over a spilled glass of tea as he is in a real fight. I'd go so far as to say the lumbering carpet's neurotic, but I'd never do it in earshot."

There was a long pause, punctuated only by the soft sounds of Meelo sipping at a second round of Merdeen's wake-up fuel. Finally, the Bimm couldn't take the waiting any more. "And the second thing?"

"Oh, Roorrr can't drive. Of course, we didn't know this when he sat down at the controls, but we figured it out real quick when the speeder's engines cut on full burn and the whole vehicle slammed nose-first into the ground. Before we could bail out, and trust me I was going to, it leveled off and started zooming in a diagonal line into the nearest power conduit pole.

"The pole came crashing down, nailed one of the swoops, and sent it spinning into the other. Both drivers caught a nasty case of ground trauma before rolling to a really ugly final stop. I was gonna hop out and see if they were still breathing, but the sparks from the severed pole fell into our speeder.

"Of course, Roorrr panicked again. No one was hurt, but the way he freaked, a skiff full of Dathomir witches could have been on our tail. He roared like a battlerager and the speeder went out of control . . ."

She paused for effect, pondering her cards. ". . . straight into the reflective glass windows of the Cartel Building. The fuel core tore open, venting flames all over the walls and billowing the thickest smoke I've ever seen. The fire-suppression systems in the building shorted out because of the downed power pole, so the emergency lights, red and brooding, kicked on and the whole place started blaring alarms. It was mass chaos.

"Barreling out of the speeder before it blew, we did the only thing we could do. We lased through the blast door, went downstairs, sliced the Cartel's mainframe, rescued our friend, and beat feet before the Cartel goons knew what hit them.

"Well, we tried to beat feet, but the way out was blocked. Not by Cartel thugs, mind you, but by an OPS speeder arriving on the scene to see what the emergency was. Now don't get me wrong -- I love OPS, and they've bailed me out more times than I'd like to count -- but we were in no shape to answer questions, and our friend needed a medic. If we'd have stopped, they would have arrested us, and rightly so. We were hosed.

"That's when Keth-Keth goes nuts. He leaps onto the hood of the OPS speeder, shrieking like a razorcat, and lobs a stun grenade inside it. The rest of my team of total idiots follows suit. The result is more ion energy in one enclosed space than I ever want to see again. I wouldn't be surprised if those poor officers ended up sterile; I really wouldn't.

"Luckily for us, the OPS officers never really got a good look at us, since they were staring at the fire when we came out. So we can make good our escape, right? Wrong. The Jawa chirps, 'We need someone to blame this on!' So he hauls a can of spray-namel out of the bag he totes around and writes in huge red letters, 'W.O.L.F.' all over the car. As we're running -- and trust me, I'm running now -- he starts shouting 'Free Kashyyyk' and 'Wookiee Liberation Front' at the top of his vocoder's digital lungs."

At that, Meelo looked down into her drink and shook her head. The Bimm, shell-shocked, spoke before she could continue. "So W.O.L.F. was just some Jawa's excuse to go grenade happy? It isn't real?"

"Pretty much, but like everything insane that Jawa does, it kinda worked out in the end. I mean, we ended up going with his plan, but it did get our friend free. And enough people have latched on to the Wookiee Liberation Front thing that it's a real organization now. I hear they're flying in relief supplies to Kashyyyk even as we speak. Wild, huh?"

The silence that followed was broken only by the quiet voice of the hooded man at the end of the bar. "If you don't mind my asking, if everything works out in the end, why are you in here trying to lose every credit you have?"

That brought what passed for a smile to the Rodian's face, though it faded quickly. "I'm just in here hiding until our latest mess

blows over." After draining her glass, Meelo continued. "You see, Keth's got this saying. 'I'm three feet tall. Anything I can hit, you can't afford to lose.' Says it all the time when things get hostile."

The cloaked figure nodded. "And?"

"So about an hour ago, we got stopped for an I.D. check at the Hedrett bridge by a couple of pain-in-the-tail clone troopers. One of them starts harassing Keth, telling him that he should get back to Tatooine before he gets deported."

Another nod. "What happened?"

"Well you see, Keth's got this stun glove . . ."

Meelo couldn't help but chuckle as every male in the bar, regardless of species, shifted uncomfortably.

Living Force Game Notes

Effective immediately, Jawa heroes in the **Living Force** campaign may purchase a special vocoder that will translate their language to Galactic Basic. This translation device is only set for those two languages, has a vocal range that can be adjusted by the user (but cannot be used to mimic specific individuals), and has a cost of 250 credits. This item weighs 1 kilogram and can be incorporated into a helmet or article of clothing for no additional cost.