BLACK JACK’S IRREGULARS SEASON 1

Chapter 1 Gilberts Grapes of Wrath

It was another wet miserable day on Gilbert’s World. The Spaceport was still as busy as ever. The Captain of the *Kaze Kurasu* met with his men at the vending terminal across from their rusty merchant vessel. The Captain, was formerly a Colonel, and was called Colonel by his men, Black Jack by his friends and enemies alike and Jackson Jessup by his dearly departed Mother.

They huddled under the awning and the steady rain that typically only gave way to the misty fog that hung over this God Forsaken fringe world. It was better than many worlds they’d been to before, but it was also worse. At least there wasn’t currently a war on, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t work for men like him and his crew who possessed a certain skill set that revolved around conflict.

They were all dressed in fatigues, though not standard issue like those they had once worn when they served in the Unions Orbital Assault Regiment. They were no longer in the military but carried themselves with the confident ease and discipline of men who were veterans.

“Okay, listen up men, Karl, and Jignesh, you two are going to make the rounds and make sure if any of our friends from USEC have followed us here they don’t catch our scent. Locke, you stay with the Kurasu, and make sure she’s in good order and ready to go if we need to leave. Major Murdoch will do a reconnoiter and get a lay of the land around here and see if he can’t find anything useful. Me and Sergeant Stone will see if we can’t get any credits at the market on some of the cargo we’ve managed to accumulate on the Kurasu. I also have a lead on a possible job that I’ll be looking into around 1700 hours local and we can meet back at the ship at 1800 hours and I can let you know what the plan is. Any questions,”

Almost in unison they all responded with a hearty ‘No Colonel’! And then broke up to go about their tasks. Sergeant Karl ‘Cancer’ Johannsen was a lanky man who moved more like a predatory cat then a man, and earned his colorful nickname for his reputation with firearms during his time with his comrades in the Orbital Assault Regiment he had been in with his comrades before they decided to ‘retire’ and pursue private employment. He was quiet and careful and could be trusted to do just about anything that the Colonel and his team required. Corporal Jignesh ‘The Tiger’ Singh was a conversely a fire brand and idealist who had joined the military so he could make a difference, but grew jaded with the Union’s politics and was outspoken, to the point that he had put the Colonel and his comrades in a tough position. They backed him, their brother, and for that, ‘The Tiger’ would follow Colonel Jessup to hell and give his life for any of his comrades. He was the reason USEC was trying to find them, so he only felt it was his duty to make sure they hadn’t followed them to Gilbert and if so, get them off the track.

Major Kyle ‘Mad Dog’ Murdoch was a mountain of a man. A product of gene modification by Union Corporations he had been an experiment to see if others like him could become replacements for the regular troops employed by the Orbital Assault Regiments. He was Jessup’s XO and he had proven to be a every bit the genetic killing machine they had made him to be, but what they didn’t expect was that his loyalty was to his CO and not the scientists that created him. He was faster, stronger and had keen senses that were above the average solider and if there was anything worth finding at the Star Port, he’d likely spot it.

Specialist Locke was another experiment of sorts, an Engineer. An enigmatic race recently incorporated into the Union. They were quiet and thoughtful people who had an incredible affinity for machines and technology, but no ambition to use that skill to expand their own Empire, they were steamrolled by the more aggressive and ambitious humans into joining their ‘Federation’. Locke was a provisional cross species exchange program sent to serve in the O.A.R. under Colonel Jessup. Jessup and his men had treated him as an equal and with respect, something totally unexpected and something he hadn’t experienced in his previous contact with humans. Locke made it his solemn duty to make sure their ship the *Kaze Kurasu* was in tip top order and that their weapons and equipment were also reliable and ready for action.

Staff Sergeant Wallace ‘Stonewall’ Stone was a member of a lower hive gang from a core world when he was scooped up by enforcers and give the option of either joining the military or being given the ‘opportunity’ to work the Asteroid belts of the local system mining Duritanium. He gambled on the odds for best survival and joined the Military to serve on the Frontier in an Orbital Assault Regiment. He had lost his original family but found a new one. He was the senior enlisted NCO in the unit before the ‘mustered out’ with the Colonel. He typically insisted on accompanying the Colonel, and was very protective of his CO and the only man who ever saw Stone as a man and not a number or a tool.

The Colonel, Jackson ‘Black Jack’ Jessup was a career military man and grew up hopping the galaxy from one military base to another with his Father that had served before him. He had originally believed in the ideal of the Union as a force for peace and unity and light throughout the galaxy, but as he got older and wiser he saw that it was a bunch of bullshit. The Union was only interested in consuming more worlds to add to its growing borders and would manufacture any reason to crush under heel anyone who would opposed their hegemony. On Kurosawa VI he’d had enough. One of his junior NCO’s, Corporal Singh had made the stand and refused to participate in the forced suppression of a hab block during the invasion of the world that just happened to also have the richest reserves of Helium-3 on it’s moons, which were of particular interest to the various mega-corps that really had become the heart and soul of the Union. When told to turnover the treasonous soldier, the Colonel and his most trusted men commandeered an old free Trader, *Kaze Kurasu* (formerly registered to the Mitsuke Militech Corporation) and left for the fringe.

After they had made some small deals with a couple of traders in the market Jessup made his way downtown to the Court building and headquarters for the Sector Magistrate, Maggie Starnes. She had met with Jessup shortly after they had made Planetfall and he’d initially thought USEC had gotten wind of his plan to land at Gilbert before he arrived, but was surprised to learn that this Starnes had heard a Freelancer had landed at the Space Port and she wanted to talk. He was certain she had to know the circumstances of he and his men, but he was learning that the Fringe was a different place and didn’t operate like the Core of Union space.

He met with Maggie who was a no-nonsense woman who believed in keeping the peace and a low profile. He had to respect that. She explained that on the fringe, a Magistrate like her would be tasked with keeping an entire planet or system in line but with hardly the resources a Union appointed Governor in the core systems had. For that reason, she had the resources to expend on Contractors. She knew who he was, but made a point to avoid the fact that she also knew why he was out here.

“Look Colonel, I need some contractors who specialize in solving violent problems with practical solutions and I got a gang of Psychos who are rampaging all over the Favella district outside the Spaceport. They are raiding the warehouses belonging to some of the Corporations and they in turn are putting pressure on me to put it to a stop or they’ll run home to their Core World CEO’s and ask for an official Union Response. I don’t’ want that, but in all seriousness, these Psychos are murdering people, people who are just trying to make a living and support their families, which isn’t easy out here.”

“I’m willing to pay you and your men to act on my authority to bring this gang to justice before anyone else dies, so will you do it?”

The Colonel nodded, and didn’t miss the part where she mentioned the Corps would call in Core Union attention, and he smiled wryly, she knew he didn’t want that either. It was an offer of payment to do what he’d signed up to do when he started his career, put down folks who stepped on those weaker then them was good enough for him, “You can count on us Magistrate.”

After the briefing the men reached the discussed jump off point for the op. It was just at the edge of the territory that they had gathered from their intel belonging to the gang. These Psychos who called themselves the “Fists” were a group of hard core nut cases that stole psychotropic drugs from the Corporate warehouse facilities and consumed them and then went on blood thirsty rampages into the parts of the built up slums where families tried to live on the meager wages they could make working for the greedy mega-corps. The government security forces on the world couldn’t match up with their firepower and typically stayed out of this part of the city. The Corporate Security forces were too busy protecting the executives and Company Assets.

The Fists had recently had a score and were going out to ‘party’, but they wouldn’t be ready for the Colonel and his men. Professional soldiers waiting in the early evening fog among the shanties of the village. They’d cleared the place out too by getting the word out, some violence would be going down and to cut down on the chance of civilian casualties.

They could hear them coming through the fog. Screaming and howling more like animals then men. Karl and Murdoch got sight of them first moving in a mob armed with blades and old surplus military rifles and assault rifles. One of them appeared to have a shotgun. The men were lined up and ready in cover. On the Colonel’s word as the enemy carelessly ran through the mist, he waited until the were close and then the squad opened fire. Karl’s light machinegun thundered rounds over head and it was no surprise it didn’t even make them keep their heads down. Stonewall tagged one with his laser carbine and burned a hole straight threw him. He took four bounding steps before he realized he was dead and collapsed. Murdoch fired as well and took down another one. Colonel Jessup moved up the flank to get closer and take a shot with his pistol. Singh cut loose with his Assault rifle as well.

It was over quickly. Murdoch had waded into battle with the one with the Shotgun and cut him down with his power blade. Stonewall shot their leader who was also wanted for the murder of a local Corporate foreman after the last raid. The sudden firefight and resistance to what had previously been their idea of a night on the town was enough to cut through their drug induced courage and the couple that were left, with their leader dead, quickly withdrew into the fog.

The Colonel in his typical post op ritual pulled out a cigar and lit it as he took stock of his unit to get the Sitrep. No one was hurt and all but two of the gang had survived the firefight. They wouldn’t be a problem anymore and Maggie would be good on her word and pay them what was owed, and the death of the gang leader would net them a nice bounty as well. One of them had a stimpack on him, too bad he didn’t have a chance to use it. The men checked weapons and ammo and made their way back to the ship.

The people came out into the tight streets and applauded and smiled at the Colonel and his men as they made their way victoriously back to the Spaceport and their ship. The Colonel smiled and patted Singh on the back who had come up to walk beside the Colonel. Singh nodded at the Colonel, this was what they had really gotten into this business for, to fight for those who couldn’t fight for themselves.

That evening Karl knocked on the Colonel’s cabin door, “Enter” the Colonel said looking up from the bills and inventory reports on his holo display.

“Hey Colonel, look, I know we haven’t been here long and just got our first job, but I just got a transmission from back home, and I need to….take care of something, look, I need to leave but I’ll catch up to you guys later.”

“What’s the problem Johannsen? You know we can help if you’d like?”

“No Sir, this is something I need to take care of.”

“I understand Sergeant, good luck, and be safe, we’ll be waiting for you.”

Karl Johanssens expression lightened a bit and he nodded “I appreciate it sir”.

Colonel Jessup nodded as the soldier left his quarters and he thought to himself, they’d be waiting, but he couldn’t know for sure if it would be on Gilbert. If the USEC spooks had tracked them here, they might have to leave in a hurry and he couldn’t help but worry they might catch up to Karl as well, and put him in a tough spot, but they weren’t in the military any more and while the men looked to him as their leader, he couldn’t ‘make’ them stay, after all, he’d offered them the chance to stay and not basically go AWOL with him to pursue a career as galactic Soldiers of Fortune.