

Comms Check

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/33731755) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/33731755>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Star Wars - All Media Types
Character:	RPG OCs
Additional Tags:	Star Wars FFG
Stats:	Published: 2021-09-07 Words: 1872

Comms Check

by [AnInformant](#)

Summary

Venka and Dash have a nice drunken midnight chat on the bridge.

Notes

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Beta/edits: VF

The tension and anxiety that had built up in earnest over the course of their last mission gradually began to seep out of Dash's tired muscles, encouraged by the Merenzane Gold now slinking through his veins. Maarek was probably going to be irked when he discovered it missing from inventory, but even he had retired to his quarters once the Century Hawk was safely transitioned to autopilot.

He reached out again to the tall pillar of amber liquor and provided his crystal glass with another generous pour - was this his third? Or fourth? Every sip had been more delicious than the last and counting was so bothersome.

His eyes dragged shut for a moment as he leaned back into the dark leather of the seat at the helm, listening to the soothing even-tempo beeping on the bridge. The peace was short-lived as the sound of a quiet shuffle found its way to his ears over the background noise. One eye opened, an eyebrow raised, he saw Venka running her hand along a horizontal crevice close to the ceiling, a small contraption clasped in the opposite with a pinprick of green flashing light that oscillated frantically when she got closer to the corner.

"What are you doing, Venka?" She jumped; he wasn't surprised she hadn't seen him despite him making no effort to conceal himself. Her situational awareness suffered when she was

concentrating on something.

“Standard bug sweep”, she whispered, either not wanting to alert any curious remote listeners, or out of some odd consideration for the silence Dash had been enjoying.

“I don’t think they need to bug us to know what we’re up to,” Dash replied, grinning.

“Which ‘they’?” she returned.

Hm...it was a good question. “Let ‘them’, whichever ‘them’ ‘they’ may be, carry on with their boring surveillance.” He paused. “Or, toss the thing out an airlock. Get Whitey to cook it. I don’t care at this point.” Sober Dash may have objected to what was certainly a careless dismissal, but he was feeling too good to allow a pathetic microchip to interfere.

“Disabling it would raise suspicion. Instead, I installed a translation mask that will make everything the crew says up here sound like coherent nonsense.” Her eyes glittered with pride; it was a nice look on her.

She tapped a few more buttons on the console and then turned back to him, stowing the scanning tool in a pocket. “All done. I’ll check on the others tomorrow; it shouldn’t take me long to figure out where they’re transmitting to.” The others!? Dash cocked an eyebrow. Had she informed him? There were always so many things in her reports.

Venka rubbed her hands together and bit her lip. “Sorry for the interruption. I hope you have a good night,” she finished, turning back towards the entryway and taking a few steps toward it.

“Join me,” he called after her, and the sound surprised even him, because his plan had in fact been an evening of mildly-intoxicated solitude.

She blinked and her eyes darted nervously to the ceiling. “Is that, uh...an order?” she asked, wringing her hands.

How absurd. The hesitation was new, though; he couldn’t think of an instance when a woman had rejected the pleasure of his company. “Of course not. Even if it was, we don’t exactly have a typical command structure here. You think the threat of an insubordination reprimand would have much of an effect on someone like Whitey? We’re only lucky that my orders happen to mostly be consistent with his compulsion to be the destructive hive rat he is naturally.”

Venka laughed, trailed by a stifled snort, and it sounded genuine so Dash chanced a chuckle too. “All right then,” she said, padding carefully over to the adjacent comms chair and sitting unassumingly with her hands folded on her lap.

Dash tipped the bottle of liquor into a second glass from the tray, then extended it to her. She was blushing...or was that from earlier?

“Is this...?” she started, staring wide-eyed at the bottle.

He cut in, “Nothing Maarek would need to hear about, right? There were some...accounting losses during our last engagement. Tragic, really.”

“Of course,” she nodded sagely with a glint in her eye, taking the proffered beverage from his hand. He silently wondered if she had felt the same jolt as their fingers brushed together.

She inhaled the vapors from the glass deeply and exhaled through her mouth, eyes fluttering shut as she took that first sip. His hadn’t been so long ago, so he knew how exquisite it was. Unlike

Whitey's procured ale and the occasional crate of Corellian whiskey they...*appropriated*...with the Gold, there were no diminishing returns - the flavor built on itself, a honeyed constructive interference that made it impossible to put down. He supposed that was why he was on his unnumbered-multiple of glasses himself. He had no doubt that the bottle would have been gone at the evening's conclusion with or without company.

Venka sighed, soft, musical, and then downed the rest. She was definitely spending too much leisure time with Melee and Maarek. Soldiers didn't understand how to savor. He couldn't bring himself to chastise her for it, though, because her expression was so content he didn't intend to ruin it. Instead, he held out the bottle as an unspoken question, and she thrust the glass back toward him eagerly, smiling. "I couldn't help it," she said, bashful. Maybe she had more self-awareness than he'd guessed.

"I understand," he said, because he did in a way, refilling his own with commensurate vigor.

They chatted that way for fifteen or twenty minutes, Venka's ability to participate in small talk improving markedly while Dash's steadily deteriorated. They were nearly on even ground, if he had to guess, by the time he broke the pleasantries with a Real Question.

"I don't know anything about you beyond your file," he declared, frustrated by the fact because they'd been working together for several months at this point. "How did you end up here?"

The query was so loaded he was baffled to see her shoulders relax. It wasn't just those, either; her whole body started to dissolve, a peaceful look settling into her stunning features and...how could he have not noticed it before? He had thought her obviously pretty the first time they had met, but otherwise unremarkable, and hadn't thought about how she looked since, until now. Her shoulder-length brown hair caught the colored glow of the consoles, and the light of the galaxy beyond the clear sapphire windows of the cockpit shadowed her perfect nose and elegant jaw in striking contrast with the dark metallic color of her uniform. Her gloves had been removed, even, so he could admire her thin fingers digging into the delicate muscles of her neck. There was no anxiety associated with the gesture, however, and her eyes avoided his by staring quite literally into space.

After the short silence, she replied, "It's nothing special. I grew up on Coruscant, like you, though I imagine in a slightly different economic class." She pushed a lock of hair behind her ear, shining crimson with the dull pulse of a maintenance screen, then blue.

"Your parents?" he asked, maybe with less tact than he had been trained to display. Family lineage was the most important quality about a potential ally, right?

She shrugged, though. "Didn't think about them a lot," she said. "My grandfather raised me in the Undercity until I started causing trouble for his associates."

He was more intrigued now. "What kind of trouble?"

She huffed. "He's the one who taught me how to manage the books. It wasn't hard to figure out how to see other peoples' too. Some of them were obviously cheating him, so I evened things out a bit." She was fidgeting now, despite the hearty influx of alcohol. "I guess that drew some...attention from Imperial Intelligence, and at sixteen I found myself...recruited, I guess? They relocated us aboveground with a security detail. I saw the light of the sun for the first time, and he was able to retire."

Dash pressed his tongue to the roof of his mouth, not used to being speechless. "I thought we all came from the military," he said, curious, since he'd been informed that his entire crew under Wolen had been reassigned from the Death Troopers. He wondered how much of her file had been

fabricated, then.

Venka considered as much as her level of sobriety would allow. “Well, not sure if you noticed, but I’m not exactly as adept with a blaster and my fists as the others.”

“Your takedown tactics are far more insidious,” he complimented, and she preened.

Before the opportunity closed, though, she returned his original question back on him. “What about you? What was your family like?” she returned, and he should have been expecting it after prying into her history himself.

He wasn’t in the mood for exposition, though. “Narcissistic assholes, the lot of them,” he said shortly, polishing off the remainder of his poison. He didn’t really swear in front of the crew, too used to his practiced decorum, so the curse tasted strange on his tongue. Venka opened her mouth to reply but he cut her off, “And before you make a quip about how the apple doesn’t fall far, I am completely aware of how much like them I am - my foray into the Empire’s military arm was pursued exclusively to prove to myself that I wasn’t. You can observe how well that’s going.” He winked, and she snickered behind her hand.

“You seem well-adjusted enough.”

“I would forgo a personal appointment from the Emperor himself to watch my father experience actual destitution,” he slurred. “That poor excuse for a man relied on his money and our name to deceive, compel, and coerce perfectly reasonable people into impossible agreements, which he would then rub in their faces and use as demonstrations of proper business dealings for his children.” He could suppose this stream of consciousness was coming from the departure of his inhibitions. “As a result, my sisters and my brother are shining examples of what it means to be a Madell, and I cast myself aside into a rather combative career to the apparent delight of Eye-Eye. They seem to have trouble recruiting diplomats, on account of how desperately boring their pitches are. Luckily for them, I didn’t care.”

She was laughing then, eyes alight, and he decided he'd go to great lengths to keep that smile on her face. It remained, if a little more coy, as she quieted for a moment before speaking again. “If you could flip a switch and erase their wealth, would you do it?” she asked pensively, rubbing a thumb across her lower lip and making eye contact, for once.

“Hell yes,” Dash replied automatically, forgetting who he was talking to. The twist of her lips further into a smirk caught the light so perfectly he couldn’t think about anything else.

It wasn’t until several days later, when he received a priority message from his father, that he realized what he had tacitly given her permission to do.

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