



## 08. On A Loop\_2

### **BANDIT**

He ended up at one of these underground warehouse parties that made the rest of the Slums feel safe. Common place for him, especially before the band. Fast, frantic trance music erupting from all the speakers. None could hear themselves talking, which was pretty much the point. The scene was pretty much what you'd expect in a place like this. Dance and sex and drugs and booze and all sorts of outrageous, Dionysian fun. Bandit, drink in hand, sat on a filthy, used up couch and asked his friend if he could find them some Flux. He didn't even notice the two individuals to his right were having sex on the couch he sat on. They didn't either. Jimmy recognized him right away from across the room. He had been playing a patient game, slowly inserting himself into the nightlife of the Slums. He parlayed his standout musical talent into a couple gigs as a DJ in underground parties like this. He had heard from the grapevine and his Sworn intel that Bandit was off

the wagon again. He figured this was the best way to get to know him.

He asked one of the guys he was with if that was really Bandit, the singer of Empire Fall, and face leader of the Militia, over there.

“Oh yeah man, that’s him for sure.”

“Does he always come to parties like this?”

“A long time ago, he would, yeah. He was a Flux dealer so he was very popular with this type of crowd. We didn’t see him for about a year though. But recently, he’s been popping up again. He’s not dealing anymore, that’s for sure. But I heard he was messing with some heavy stuff. He’s famous now, you know.”

“Could you introduce me?”

“I don’t think so but let me get my buddy, he knows him pretty well.”

They came up to Bandit, asked if it was ok to sit down (He said “If you can find a spot”, indicating he was aware of what was going on next to him, just didn’t care enough to move.)

They pulled up another couch that was nearby, and Jimmy was introduced by this “promoter”.

“Hey B, just wanna say it’s an honor to have you here tonight.. This is Jim, our new DJ, he’s pretty dope actually.”

Bandit didn't react, looking all around the room for his friend he had sent on a Flux hunt.

"Hey man, great to meet you," he said, barely acknowledging Jimmy.

It was fine. Years of working the club circuit as a gigging musician, then as a booker and a club manager, had hardened Jimmy. He knew how to deal with this type of behavior from people.

"Hey man, I'm Jim... Big fan of your stuff actually."

Bandit looked at him for the first time and did a double take.

"Oh thanks dude! What did you say your name was?"

"Jim."

Bandit was trying to place this dude. He had seen him before, that's for sure.

"Do I know you from somewhere?"

"Maybe you do."

They stared at each other in silence for about a minute.

## **MADS**

Vera had woken up early, as per usual, but when Mads came down for his morning coffee, she hadn't left for her morning run yet. Which was unusual. She never missed it. Sick, with thunderous rain outside,

she would always go. But today, she hadn't.

"Hey V! Haven't left yet?"

"Mads we gotta talk. Not here. Can you make your coffee to go? We need to go for a walk, right now."

She looked like she hadn't slept at all. Mads knew this was something important.

"Sure thing V, give me 1 minute."

She told him everything. The Jimmy-is-a-killer stuff, the Rentoth stuff, everything. Mads, always great under pressure, didn't panic. He agreed with her theory. Someone was getting to them. And while there was no way to verify if all of this was true, the goal was obvious: To divide them. To create dissension within Empire Fall and everyone in their orbit.

They sat down on a random street bench.

"It's gotta be the Sworn. It's gotta be Zero," he said.

She agreed.

"So what do we do now?"

"I think we play this one close to the chest. And while it pains me to say it, I don't think we can trust anyone with this theory. Not my brother, not Sophie, not the militants, NO ONE. Except for maybe Bandit, if he ever comes back from his bender."

"Yeah... I think it's the prudent move... But Mads... Jimmy... what the fuck did he get himself into?!"

She buried her head in her hands and burst out in tears. Mads put his arm around her and moved his head closer to hers.

"I'm so sorry V. We're gonna get through this. Together."

Her phone vibrated. A text from Rentoth.

"Hey V. Thanks for last night. I contacted a few of my friends who can still pull some strings. They're gonna get me the names of the Sworn soldiers who killed my mom. I'm not gonna be around for a while, I gotta see this thing through. Tell Bandit I'll miss his sorry ass. Hopefully I'll see you guys around."

Her blood froze. If that note told the truth, and if Jimmy was really responsible, then it was only a matter of time before Rentoth found out.

Mads tried to reassure her, but he thought the same thing. They needed to find Bandit and talk this through with him. They needed to find him NOW.