

From the desk of Lieutenant Gian Webb

The Legend of Valin Tusk

Aboard the *ISDII Hammer*, the name Valin Tusk describes a near mythical character. Though legendary, Valin is no mere story. Veteran pilots will happily enthrall awestruck cadets with tales of their experience with the man. The story goes that he was a hardened barkeep by trade. Though the planet that he called home seemed to change each time that he was asked, Valin Tusk eventually found a career as the Epsilon Squadron steward and barkeep. For many years he served in that role, preparing pilots for battle, and aiding in their recovery with strong spirits and good company.

At some point around 18 ABY, Valin, with the aid of several Epsilon pilots, developed the drink now known as Epsi-Cola. Shortly thereafter, Valin Tusk vanished, seeking the “final ingredient” for Epsi-Cola. In his absence, the recipe -sans final ingredient- was passed to the Epsilon Commander. The recipe is a closely guarded secret which passed from Commander to Commander. It eventually reached the desk of Coranel Both who has been instrumental in developing the drink into the galaxy wide phenomenon that it is today.

But the question of Valin Tusk’s whereabouts still stands. At the behest of Epsilon Squadron Commander Nova Discordia, a definitive report of the *Legend of Valin Tusk* was assembled. The following report was assembled through interviews with *ISDII Hammer* veterans, archived information, intercepted deep space communication signals, and a healthy dose of speculation:

In the weeks and months following its creation, Epsi-Cola quickly became a favorite drink within the Epsilon Squadron cantina. In fact, crew members from all around the *ISDII Hammer* visited to sample this bold new beverage. However, its originator, Valin Tusk, felt something amiss with the drink. The pilots he served were happy, and any other steward would be content, but Tusk sought perfection. Records state that he handed off all knowledge about the production of Epsi-Cola to the Epsilon Squadron Commander before packing up a shuttle and leaving with the mention of finding “the final ingredient”. His

shuttle was headed to the galactic west, giving rise to rumors that he was headed for the Unknown Regions.

Valin Tusk did head towards the Unknown Regions, at least to begin. He reasoned that the final piece in his Epsi-Cola concoction would lie beyond the mapped bounds of civilization. This first leg of his journey would be remembered as Tusk's favorite. Between short hyperspace jumps Tusk found himself in contact with all sorts of galactic citizens. From local space voyagers, to massive trade convoys, and even the occasional fellow Imperial Remnant. It is even rumored that Tusk came into contact with the odd scientific exploration of the New Republic. Those who would have formerly been bitter enemies were now valuable resources in the construction of his liquid magnum opus.

Every new encounter not only broke up the monotony of space travel, but also provided a chance for Valin Tusk to restock supplies and collect data. Whenever possible, the former bartender would engage in long conversations, sometimes even sharing samples of his latest Epsi-Cola prototypes with these passersby. Through these months of his journey Tusk met a wide cross section of the galaxy. He was no longer trying to just create a beverage for the Epsilon Squadron pilots (who he still thought fondly of) but was instead striving to make the perfect drink for sentient creatures everywhere.

But good times couldn't last forever, and these social interactions became fewer and further in between. The Unknown Regions were a dangerous place, and few other souls ventured as far as Tusk's brave shuttle. Meanwhile, Valin's quest was not turning up results. The rare survivable planets failed to turn up the missing piece in the Epsi-Cola puzzle. Valin Tusk grew more and more despondent. Retreating into his ship, then into his own mind, Tusk practically let the shuttle steer itself through a series of micro jumps in a spinward direction as he drifted into deep contemplation.

This contemplation lasted for years. As his shuttle continued its solitary journey through space, Valin Tusk reached out to things beyond. He would awaken from this deep meditation only on rare occasions to sustain his physical form. And yet, there seemed to be some other force at work, keeping him alive and well. For while the rations stored aboard

could sustain the average humanoid for perhaps a two-month journey, Tusk carried on in this way for just over a decade. Deep contemplation, the occasional nudge, but in general, a deep and pervasive silence. Unbeknownst to Tusk, at this same time Epsi-Cola was gaining popularity throughout the galaxy under the guidance of General Coranel Both. Times were changing, and this tranquility would not last forever.

On one of Valen Tusk's rare forays into the waking world he found himself gazing through the bridge window into the deep blue hyperspace tunnel beyond the hull. Each passing wisp of light or blot of shadow could be the solution to his quest. And yet, Tusk knew that he wasn't there yet. If anybody were around to ask him how he knew no answer would be forthcoming. Maybe the years of barkeep intuition, maybe something else, but Tusk could just feel it. There was something on the horizon, that much was sure. Soon Tusk's journey would come to a close.

That horizon was much closer than could ever have been expected. Before Valin Tusk had a chance to leave the bridge and continue his meditations, he was launched forward as the shuttle suddenly exited hyperspace. As Tusk climbed to back to his feet, a modern titan of mercantilism met his eyes. Beyond the shuttle's window stretched out a caravan for dozens of miles. Massive cargo freighters in the hundreds were all flying together across space. The most reliable reports place this encounter over Kal'Shebbol, the outer end of the Rimma trade route, where the caravans reverse direction and return to the core.

Unlike previous encounters, Valin tusk made no friends. There was not the shared comradery of deep space. These were great metal beasts, moving in a vast heard only for safety in numbers. Tusk found no place for a roaming barkeep, and when the caravan stopped off in Elrood for cargo he carried on. Now with no company but the universe around him. A universe which beckoned him onward.

The next system would prove monumental, something which Tusk felt the moment his shuttle exited hyperspace. Before him stood a dim white star. But that wasn't of consequence, it was a lush swamp planet which drew him in. The shuttle called it Dagobah but knew nothing else. Tusk's vision tunneled as he approached the planet, now on a single-

minded quest to the surface. This had to be the solution to his problem, it just had to be. By the time he set foot on the swampy surface his vision was an unintelligible blur, and he walked guided only by intuition.

Trough murky water and over gnarled roots Valin Tusk stumbled. His hands were outstretched, reaching for an ingredient that just had to be there. And through this unfamiliar land, Tusk pressed on. All around him were sounds of unseen dangers and vicious perils. But Tusk did not waver, he had no room for fear anymore. Over roots he climbed, and the sounds of the swamp gave way to the muted echoes of a cave. Then his foot hit metal, and vision restored.

Valin Tusk stood in the Epsilon cantina, a home not seen for over a decade. This beautiful realm of joy, now torn asunder. Everything he had held dear was strewn about and destroyed. Lining the floor were piles of TIE pilot helmets. Each one bore the name of a dear customer and friend. The great pilots of Epsilon, laid out for Tusk to see just how much he had given up. This forsaken past laid in ruin. Like living water Tusk's vision changed. He stood in a stuffy boardroom, at the end of a massive desk. All around the table sat stuffy, done up, corporate suits. And at the head of this grand table, sat a vision of Tusk himself. Dressed in clothes no self-respecting barkeep would ever don and pouring over document after document. Droning on about price ceilings and profit margins and more. A horrifying future. Valin Tusk's magnum opus gone corporate. Epsi-Cola stood before him, no longer a nerve calmer before the big mission, or a moral boost after the big fight. No. Before Valin stood an empire of greed, leeching every last credit that Epsi-Cola was good for. And steering this ship of mercantilism, a dark façade of Tusk himself.

The suits droned on for eternities. Tusk could not fight them, for they had no physical form, and he could not retreat. He just watched, over and over, as his beautiful dream morphed into what all artisans dread, a soulless corporation. Epsi-Cola was about bringing people together. Not about suits around a desk with papers and graphs. It was all wrong! Tusk lashed out wildly. His hand struck earth; the vision faded. Valin Tusk was alone, in a dank cave on a swamp planet. But in his hand, he held a dim green root. Grown out of the wall, almost like it was waiting for him to arrive. And as the rest of galaxy passed by, going

about their day to day, Valin Tusk celebrated. All alone, in an empty cave, Tusk celebrated. He had no plan, and he had no course of action, but he had his final ingredient, he just knew it.