

GJW XI: Round 2 - Fiction

A Simple Delivery

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**Korriban
Dreshdae
Now**

Karim nearly fell over as he skidded around another corner and flew down the darkened alleyway. His breath came out in ragged gasps, and his legs yelled for him to stop, but fear and adrenaline kept him moving. It was a simple delivery. Pick up the package, drop off the credits and come back to the shop. It all happened as it should have, and then the proverbial crap had hit the equally proverbial fan, and now he ran for his life down areas of Dreshdae he had thought he had left behind him.

He thought he had lost the others as he took one more corner, as a figure suddenly loomed ahead of him...

**Korriban
Dreshdae
Earlier**

“Dammit boy, get your lazy ass over here!”

Karim Adulin looked up from his desk, trying to hide the grimace from his face. Old Bertrand, or Bert to many of the older folks around Dreshdae, was the owner of the shop that Karim currently worked in. The shop dealt in antiquities, being so close to the various Sith ruins on Korriban, and while the more public pieces were just pretty baubles, Bertrand was also known to get his hands on some true relics. Karim had literally fell into employment, tripping as he tried to steal one of those pretty baubles some years back. Bertrand had a soft-spot for streetkids, and had offered Karim a job, instead of throwing him to the authorities. That soft-spot was very small however, and most days he was just a complete pain-in-the ass. Those were one of those days.

“Yes yes, glad of you to look up, boy,” Bertrand continued in his overly-loud voice. “I got a delivery charge for you. You can go on cleaning after!”

Karim slowly rose to his feet, stifling a groan as he made his way towards the old man. He knew what the “delivery jobs” meant, and he was already dreading the trip he would have to be making. Bertrand threw a small bundle at him, Karim catching it easily with his nimble hands. The jingle of coins was unmistakable, but the heft of the bag was larger than he was used to.

“This is important, Karim,” Bertrand stated, his voice lowering even though no one else was in the ship. The old man almost never said his name and it startled him to hear it. “I know I’m hard on you, boy. Hopefully this can change things for us. Head to the Noose. Regular table. Contact will be waiting there.”

Karim nodded silently, fear gnawing at his stomach. Bertrand’s regular facade had cracked, and it scared him more than all the yelling and screaming that generally came out of his mouth.

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The Hanged Noose, or just the Noose to most regulars, was a seedy bar just off the main road through Dreshdae. Unless you knew to look for it, you would probably miss it, and that was just fine with those that frequented it. Karim walked through the door, never quite getting used to the musky smell that hit him as he entered. His feet carried him with practiced ease through the jumble of tables, the lighting inside the bar keeping things dim enough to barely tell who was seated at any given time.

The bartender looked his way. Karim had never bothered to learn his name, and with a face like that, he never wanted to. With a slight flick of his hand he tossed the bartender a golden coin, the customary “tip” required by the Noose when official business was conducted. Karim’s legs carried him forward, towards the back of the room and the table reserved for Bertrand’s customary dealings. There’s was already a man draped over one of the chairs, a long, brown overcoat hiding the bulk of his body. Unruly blond-hair sat on top of his head, and he had a lit cigarette dangling from his lips.

“I don’t have all day, kid,” the man whispered, motioning for Karim to take a seat. Karim frowned at him as he took the other chair. Words were generally not exchanged during these “deliveries”.

The man reached into his overcoat, and pulled a large envelope out of it. He passed it over the table, and as Karim reached out to grab it the man suddenly clamped his free hand around his arm.

“You take this straight back, you hear? You stop for nothing.” Karim nodded wordlessly, his nose wrinkling from the puff of smoke that floated in front of him as the other man’s hands let

go and Karim placed the envelope inside of his tunic. In the same motion he brought out the hefty bag of coins and passed it back to the other man.

“Was a pleasure, kid,” the man said, as he rose out of his seat and stomped out his cigarette. “I’ll be seeing you.”

Karim started at the last words, jerking his head up to confront the other man, but all he saw was the rest of the bar; the man had disappeared.

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Karim turned the corner, quickly walking up to his shop, but stopping dead in his tracks as he reached out to open the door. He could hear a large commotion inside, and all of the windows had been covered. Absently he touched the breast of his tunic, ensuring the envelope was still there, as he slowly turned the old-fashioned handle of the shop and slipped in.

Give us the papers, old man

Karim couldn’t stop himself from giving a squeak of surprise at the scene before him. Bertrand was floating in mid-air, his face lined with cuts and bruises. Surrounding him was a floating interrogation droid, a gaunt-looking man in black robes and a nightmarish-droid that appeared to be some gruesome version of a skeletal human. It was the droid that was speaking, its mechanical voice devoid of all humanity.

All three turned at once to look at Karim, Bertrand seemingly ignored as he fell back to the floor with a loud thud.

Do you have the papers?

Karim squeaked again and flew back out the door without answering, running down the streets of Dreshdae as fast as his legs could take him. All he could see were the glowing-red eyes of the droid-thing, and the sound of Bertrand’s body as it hit the floor. He took the first corner hard, his feet giving out from under him as he slid across the dirt-packed ground. He could feel the cuts on his legs and hands, but never stopped to look as he was instantly back on his feet and sprinting down the lit alley.

He hit another corner, almost skidding away again before finding his feet and going headlong into the darkened alley. These alleys were once home to him, and now they may be his death if he didn’t find shelter soon. One more corner, and now he no longer felt the panic of someone chasing him. As he deigned to think he had lost his pursuers, a figure suddenly loomed ahead of him.

Karim skidded to a halt, falling to his backside as a bright green light appeared from the figure's hand. His heart was thundering so loud that he barely heard the sound that came from behind him. Fear gripped him too tightly to turn and look. He knew what he would find. He could only sit there, shaking in terror, and waiting for the end.

The figure in front of him moved with inhuman speed, vaulting over him. Karim could see only green-and-black flash by, followed by the smell of ozone and burning metal. There was a shriek of despair as well that finally got Karim to get up and moving. He never once looked back as he stumbled onwards, trying to find the energy to get to somewhere safe.

He had to use his hands to support him on the walls as he moved from alley-to-alley. The sounds of battle were slowly dimming, and he didn't hear anyone else behind him. He had an old safe house nearby, one of the places he would use as shelter when it became too cold for him to stay out on the streets. He finally let himself calm down, and felt the adrenaline fleeing his body as he neared the warmth of shelter.

"Just a moment there, lad."

Karim stopped dead in his tracks as his heart fell into his stomach. Closing his eyes and taking a deep breath Karim slowly turned around. Opening his eyes he could see the man from the Noose, his coat flapping behind him from the breeze as another lit cigarette hung from his lips.

"I told you I'd be seein' you again, kid."

The other man casually strode up to him, taking his time to knock off a line of ashes from his cigarette. Karim knew he should run, or scream, or do something, but all he could do was stand still. The other man reached into his tunic, taking the envelope he had originally given him and placing it back inside his coat.

"Seems you had some complications, kid. No worries. I'm sure I'll be finding another pusher for this."

Karim started to say something, but the words would never come out as a beam of light suddenly punctured his throat. He could hear the *snap-hiss* as the light disappeared and he collapsed to the floor. Darkness slowly crept in as his head lay down on the ground and watched as the other man slowly walked out of sight.

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Had Karim still been alive he would have seen that figure from the alleyway return. His blade of green was still there as he knelt beside his body. The figure never spoke as he rummaged through his clothing, looking for an envelope he would never find.

Had Karim still been alive, he would have seen the figure look for clues around his body. The figure did find the ashes that had fallen close to his body, and spoke the words "Grey" as if in a curse before rising and moving away.

But Karim never did hear those words, or any others from that day forward. He had returned to the alleys of his birth to die.