

The first thing that went through Larrik Dul'vak's mind upon regaining consciousness was to wonder how long it had been since his last fix of glitterstim. As soon as he cracked his eyes opened, pain flared through his skull and he slammed his eyes shut again and let out a groan.

*At least 24 hours then. Dammit.*

"I see you're finally awake."

Larrik reflexively turned toward the voice and opened his eyes again, this time much more cautiously. His vision was blurred, out of focus and it took several seconds of blinking before it finally centered and he realized that he was looking at a young woman leaning against a wall. A couple of blinks more and he noted that the woman was a Mirialan, the characteristic green skin and geocentric tattoos on her face making it clear what she was.

"Yeah," He grunted before he tried to rub his eyes. Sudden resistance from his right wrist caused him to look down and realized that he was chained to the floor by his right hand. "What the kark?"

"Yeah, we're trapped here," The woman said, pulling at her own chain that Larrik now realized was actually one single chain that bound the two together through a welded in loop of metal on the floor. "Whatever here is."

Larrik looked around at his surroundings for the first time, taking note of the deck panels and the sole viewport within the room. He let out another quiet groan as a hot spike of pain shot through his brain, causing him to shut his eyes again.

"...are you okay?" The Mirialan asked, a slight note of concern in her tone. "I don't think we've been tortured, although I really don't remember much of the past couple days."

"Just a raging headache, hun," Larrik sighed and rubbed at his left temple with his free hand. "Anyways, I think we're on a Corvette, if the bolt holes on the floor are what I think they are."

"Don't call me hun," The Mirialan snapped before frowning. "And how can you tell?"

"Then give me something to call you, *hun*," He grunted before nodding down at the floor where several conspicuous bolt holes were visible. "That's where furniture used to be installed. Whoever they are, they took it out and turned this place into an improvised cell. Bad mistake, but some pirates are stupid."

"Pirates?" The Mirialan raised a skeptical eyebrow. "How do you know it's pirates?"

"Just a guess, but most militaries and professionals aren't stupid enough to put prisoners in a VIP passenger room that just happens to have a door override built behind the panel next to it."

Larrik smirked as he nodded toward the sole door that led out of their cell. "So my guess? Pirates that just got started on the trade and hadn't bothered to review ship specs. And you still haven't given me a name."

The Mirialan stared at him for a long moment before letting a small sigh escape her. "You can call me Zayla."

"Zayla," Larrik felt a harsh chuckle escape him. "Pretty name for a made up one."

"Like I'm going to tell the likes of you who I am," Zayla snorted. "Some merc hired by the Inquisitorius."

"The Inquisit—" Larrik stared at her for a few second and then laughed, wincing right after as another bolt of pain shot through him. "Oh this is *karking* rich! Let me guess, you're with them Jedi. But judging by your attitude, I'm guessing you're not one yourself."

"Oh gee, you must be a secret Sith Lord to display such genius," Zayla snorted. "Too bad that brain of yours can't just bust you out and turn me in for a stack of credits, eh, merc scum?"

"Aw babycakes, you say that like it's an insult," Larrik smirked as he tugged his chain, looking at the loop of metal welded into the deck. "But since I don't know who you actually are, and I'm not currently on the job, how bout we make a deal, huh?"

"Like I'm supposed to just trust you?" Zayla rolled her eyes. "You mercs are just in for the money. What's to stop you from stabbing me in the back the next chance you get?"

"Nothing, really." Larrik shrugged slightly. "But you know I'm a merc that works for them Jedi hunters, and you'll be watching me every step of the way. If I try to stab your back, well, you'll be expecting it. It's either that or we can rot here til the pirates or whoever kills us."

Zayla stared at him for a heartbeat and then let out an annoyed sigh, which elicited a smirk from the Human.

"Fine, but I *will* be watching you."

"Aw, that's sweet hun, you know I'll be watching you too," Larrik grinned and winked before finally beginning to move. Shifting himself into a crouch with the limited amount of movement the chain afforded him, he grunted as his muscles protested, numb from not moving so long. "Right, pirates were sloppy. Looks like they thought a simple chain job would keep us restrained. We'll need to cut the chain later, but if we both pull at it, we can probably rip out the metal loop job they welded in."

"Yeah, alright," Zayla replied as she mirrored Larrik's movements, getting herself into position. "Though you would think some pirates, even dumbass ones, would restrain us with shock cuffs or something."

"Hun, I've been around some really, *really stupid* pirates. If I were to guess, they're just starting out and are too cheap to buy proper cuffs," Larrik snorted as he grabbed a section of chain and hefted it. "Or just don't have the funds. Either way, they're going to regret it now. Ready?"

"Ready. And don't call me hun."

The two prisoners began to pull back on the chain, straining with all their strength. Larrik gritted his teeth as sweat began to bead along his forehead as he continued to yank backward. The welded seal on the loop of metal was beginning to crack with thin spiderwebs, but did not break. Finally, Larrik released the chain and fell back onto his rear.

"Karking hell," he gasped out as he breathed in gulps of air. "Been a damn sight while since I've had to do this crap."

Zayla scoffed as she released the chain and stared at him with baleful violet eyes.

"Some merc you are. Can't even break a damn welding seal."

Larrik ignored her for the moment as he concentrated on getting his breathing under control, while also trying to ignore the razors that were scraping inside of his brain.

*Got to get a karking hit of glit soon or I'm going to murder this bitch.*

"Alright, let's do this again," Larrik said finally as he got back on his feet, wrapping a section of chain around his hand. "Ready?"

"Ready."

They both yanked backward again with all of their strength, and this time the seal broke. The two prisoners flew backwards onto their rear, skidding back into the wall. Larrik let out a moan as his head collided with the durasteel wall with a sharp *crack*.

"*God-karking-dammit!*" Larrik swore as sharp bright lights exploded behind his eyes, tears forming at the corners. "Hell, I need to get some gl- painkillers soon."

"Yeah, well that's going to have to wait til we're off this ship," Zayla snapped as she rose back to her feet and stretched. "Damn, that feels good. Now what's this about an override in the door?"

"Aren't you a joy to work with," Larrik muttered to himself as he rose to his feet and approached the door. "Alright, let's see here..."

It didn't take long for Larrik to pop open the semi-hidden panel and flip the override switch. A quiet *click* signified the unlocking of the door.

"Alright, hopefully there's someone standing guard just outside," Larrik began before he was cut off.

"You *want* someone to be standing guard?" Zayla hissed, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"You want us to get killed?"

"If you would just damn well me finish," Larrik hissed back. "I'm going to hit the door release and if there's something standing guard, we're going to rush him and use the chain to choke the life outta him. Then we can take his weapons and get the hell off this ship."

"...alright, fine," Zayla nodded as she wrapped a section of the chain that still bound them together around her hand. "That actually sounds workable. Ready when you are."

Larrik nodded and copied her, his hand clenching the chain tightly until his knuckles were white.

"Now!" He shouted as he slammed the door release.

The two instantly stormed out, startling a Duros who was casually leaning against the wall. The Duros let out a surprised yelp before the chain was suddenly looped around his throat and squeezed tight. The Duros struggled, his hands tugging at the chain, but the two attackers were simply too strong. The alien's skin turned a darker shade of green and his red eyes seemed to bulge out of his skull. A minute later, he went limp and collapsed, staggering the two prisoners as his body weight dragged them downward. A moment later, they finally released the now dead Duros.

Larrik was on the body in an instant and within seconds had the blaster in hand. Zayla froze and glowered at the Human, her hands carefully raised.

"This the part where you shoot me?" She said bitterly, her lips twisted into a scowl.

"Oh, you wound me, hun," Larrik snorted and instantly turned the blaster onto the chain and fired point-blank at the middle of it. A second later, the chain was in two pieces, and the two were no longer bound together by it.

Larrik stared at Zayla for a few seconds and then flipped the blaster around, extending it toward the Mirialan. "All yours, hun."

Zayla's eyes widened as she accepted the gun into her hand, staring at Larrik incredulously.

"Quit with the looks, hun. You can flatter me another time," Larrik smirked and nodded toward the door at the end of the hallway. "If there's a hangar on this bucket, it'll be somewhere in that direction."

"No, why would you just... give me the gun?" Zayla asked, her eyebrows furrowing as she studied the man.

"Because I'm crap with blasters," Larrik sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "And to be damn blunt, I'm a druggie that's going through withdrawal. You're a spanking good Jedi helper or whatever you call yourselves, so you're probably cleaner than I am, and can shoot straighter. All I want is to get off this damn ship and get some grit into me. So, you lead while I direct us to the hangar, you kill whatever gets in our way, and then we escape. You can drop me off at the nearest populated planet, and be on your merry way. Sound good, hun?"

"You're the weirdest merc I've ever met," Zayla said before turning toward the door Larrik indicated. "But at least you're honest... enough. Yeah, sounds good. But call me *hun* again, and I'm putting a bolt in your foot."

"Whatever you say, babycakes."

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The way was quiet at first, with only the occasional grubby pirate standing guard in every other room. but as soon as they walked through the next door, a hallway that, by Larrik's reckoning would be a small hangar bay holding a couple shuttles, the alarms began to wail.

"Huh. Surprised it took them this long to notice that we're missing," Larrik grunted and rubbed at his temples. "Goddammit, that thing's not helping my headache."

"Shut up, merc, we're almost out of here."

"Not fast enough," Larrik growled as he approached the last door and slammed the release.

Zayla quickly swept past him and began firing, Larrik following quickly behind her, dropping to a crouch as he watched the Mirialan coolly pick off the few pirates that were in the hangar bay. He noticed with a slight sigh of relief that a pair of YT-class freighters were docked in the bay.

*Huh. YT-2400 model. Don't see that kind around much these days.*

As the last pirate was dispatched, Larrik quickly turned back and slammed the door control, sealing them inside and preventing any pirate reinforcements from coming through for at least a few minutes.

"There, that should—" Larrik started to say as he turned and was cut off as he stared straight into the barrel of Zayla's blaster.

"Sorry partner, but here's where we part." Zayla smiled as she slowly walked backwards toward the YT-2400 freighter. "It was nice having your help, but I really can't risk having you with me. Sorry."

"Oh come on, hun!" Larrik protested, one hand slowly reaching behind him. "All I want is a quick drop-off on Nar Shaddaa or some other spaceport! Surely you can do that without ratting out your Jedi buddies!"

"Sorry, but I got other pressing business, and carrying your sorry ass isn't one of them," Zayla shrugged slightly. "A shame, though. And merc? You can stop reaching for that blaster *right now*."

Larrik froze.

"Good boy. Now, I'm not stupid. I figured you picked up a gun on our way out here while I wasn't looking," Zayla smirked. "Now I'm leaving. And remember what I said from before?"

"Uh... refresh my memory?" Larrik gulped slightly as he kept his eyes on the barrel of Zayla's gun.

"Don't call me *hun*."

A second later, Larrik howled in pain as he collapsed to the ground, his hands clutching at his foot where Zayla had just fired a bolt into it.

"Now buh-bye, sweetie, take care of yourself!" Zayla blew a kiss toward Larrik before turning and running up into the lowered ramp of the YT-2400 freighter.

"You damn *bitch!*" Larrik screamed as he watched the ramp raise up.

A minute later, the freighter began to lift up, and within seconds it was gone. Larrik swore and forced himself up to his feet, hobbling toward the other freighter.

*Goddamn schutta, just had to shoot me, the little-*

Larrik continued his internal cursing as he hobbled up the ramp of the freighter and lurched toward the medical bay. Collapsing into a seat, Larrik pried open a small medical container that was on the table and picked up an injector, already pre-loaded with an anagselectic. The medicine quickly got to work within him, and within moments the burning pain in his foot was reduced to a dull throbbing.

"Oh thank god..." Larrik sighed as he leaned back into the chair and closed his eyes. A few seconds later, they snapped back open. "Oh hell, the bosses."

He rose to his feet again and hobbled toward the cockpit, soon settling himself into the pilot's chair and putting on a communications headset. He quickly punched in a frequency and waited for the communications link to connect, while running through the freighter's pre-flight startup list.

"*Dul-vak?*" Larrik winced as he heard the cold monotone through the headset. It never ceased to give him shivers every time he heard that voice.

"Yeah, boss. Mission's gold. Your Jedi helper spy took the bait." Larrik grunted as the engines began to warm up, sending shudders through the hull of the ship. "Said she had pressing business, otherwise she would've given me a lift. Then shot me in the karking foot."

"A pity," The voice said flatly. "*Then our spies will take it from there. She took the YT-2400 freighter, yes?*"

"Yep. You were right on the dot there. Long as your boys did their job right, homing beacon should lead you to some juicy target."

"*Excellent. Payment is being transferred to your account now. How is the trembling?*"

"The uh... what?" Larrik blinked at the out of nowhere question.

"*You're going through withdrawal. It has been about 36 hours since your last fix, so by now your muscles should be beginning to seize up from the lack of glitterstim. If you don't get some in your body in the next 12, well...*"

"Well, thank you for that info," Larrik said sarcastically as he activated the freighter's repulsorlifts. "That's why my next stop's Nar Shaddaa, so I can get my hands on glit."

"*That will not be required. If you look in the compartment just below the pilot station, you will find an glitterstim stick prepared for you.*"

"Huh?" Larrik followed the voice's instructions and his eyes widened as he saw the glitterstim stick storied inside, along with a lighter. "Goddamn, you guys are karking great!"

*“We take care of our capable servants,”* The voice said dryly. Larrik ignored it as he clamped the glitterstim stick between his lips and lit it up.

“Ooooh, damn! That. Hits. The. Spot,” Larrik exhaled, feeling the glitterstim already infusing itself within him. Almost instantly, the severe headache loosened its grip on him and he sighed with genuine relief for the first time since he woke up. “You guys are the best. This mean you got another job?”

*“Indeed. Stay close, you will be contacted by an Undesirable seeking to hire you. Accept the job and do what he says. We will be in touch when the time is right.”*

“An Undesirable? One of them aliens your big boss doesn’t like?”

*“Yes. Guard your thoughts well around this one. It would be... unfortunate if he were to discover whom you actually serve.”*

“Wait, you already know who’s going to hire me?”

“Oh yes,” Larrik shivered then as he imagined a smile on the other end of the line. It wasn’t a pleasant image. *“His name is Zakath Agrona, one of the renegade Dark Jedi that serve Clan Arcona.”*

“Huh. Alright,” Larrik said as he guided the freighter out of the Corvette’s hangar. “Well I’m going to hit Nar Shaddaa in the meantime, stock up on glit and get the damn foot looked at. If this Zakath’s any good, he should be able to find me pretty easily there. But uh... why would he hire me? I mean, I’m good but but not exactly galaxy famous here.”

*“You let us worry about that,”* The voice grew even frostier than it usually was. *“All you need to know is that he will contact you. Accept what he offers, and then wait for further instructions. Is that understood?”*

“Whatever you say, boss,” Larrik shrugged slightly. “Keep the credits and spice flowing, and I’ll take care of whatever you spooks need doing.”

“Good. We will be in touch.”

Larrik grunted and took another hit from the smouldering glitterstim stick as the communications link disconnected, sighing as his mind began to cloud up with pleasurable tingling.

“You guys are goddamn creepy,” He muttered as the navicomputer completed its calculations and beeped its readiness. “Whatever. Next stop, Nar Shaddaa.”