

I THOUGHT I SAW AN ARDENT

In the infinite darkness of space, the Simiyar Light Freighter known as the “*Dark Star*” D.S. *Silver Frog* resumed normal travel coming out of hyper-drive with a snap into real space orbiting the planet Balmorra. Lights on the sensor control panel lit up as two more ships exited Hyperspace one after the other. Both were Foray-Class Blockade Runners. With a quick flicker of the panel, another ship exited hyperspace. This one was nearly undetectable on sensors until the last moment, not to mention five times the size of the Foray-Class ships. An Ardent-Class Frigate appeared before Zul Zorrander in his forward viewport windows.

He had heard they were very rare and expensive to make. Especially one with countermeasures that blocked sensors on ships exiting Hyperspace. Zul immediately became uneasy as he felt an intense Force presence on the frigate. Feeling compelled to hail the ship, Zul did so. He opened the comms and spoke.

“This is Neophyte Zul Zorrander, Apprentice Inquisitor of House Galeres of Clan Arcona. Hailing from the ship D.S. *Silver Frog*. With whom am I speaking?” Zul waited, and after a brief pause was greeted by a commanding male voice. “This is Vice Admiral Ulan of the ship *Veer’s Revenge*. You are expected — the Chief Inquisitor requests your presence immediately.” Without further pause or comment the comm went dead. Zul could only ponder what he had gotten himself into now.

Exiting the airlock, Zul was greeted by a four-man squad of Marine Commandos. *This ought to be fun*, he thought to himself. The squad commander spoke. “This way, Apprentice Inquisitor,” commanded the marine. Zul breached the airlock walkway and boarded the frigate. The ship was enormous. Vibrant and glorious, like nothing he had ever seen before. Zul was in awe as he was escorted to the Chief Inquisitor’s office.

“In there!” ordered the marine, pointing to the hatch leading to the Chief’s office. Two Marine Commandos assumed posts on either side of the door, while the squad

commander and another entered the Chief's office. Zul gazed around as quickly as he liked as to hopefully go unnoticed. He was able to see another person standing wirily to the side of the Chief Inspector. A tall slender man, trying his best to go unnoticed.

"Neophyte Zorrander," boomed the deep, intimidating voice of whom Zul could only imagine to be the Chief Inquisitor. Before him stood a stout man, well into his forties, with greying hair. He was steel eyed and had a cold stare that would freeze any man where they stood. "I see here you are an Apprentice Inquisitor, new to our ranks. Well, I am not here to welcome you. I have a task and you *will* accomplish it where others have not," he said pointedly. Zul only stood in amazement. This was not what Zul had expected at all. "I am your Consul, Warlord Protek. Chief Inquisitor and you are now under my command." He motioned to his aid that Zul now saw in full view. Definitely a human, he was dressed like a bureaucrat in a formal suit befitting his stature. Whatever that may be.

"My aide," Consul Protek began to say. "is Aedile Zumdahl, he will be giving you all the pertinent information that you will need about the task that I am assigning you to." The aide began to speak. "Neophyte Zorrander, you are tasked with a job and are to head to [Nar Shaddaa](#), to recover a list of Jedi sympathizers across the Brotherhood's Clans. This list has names compiled by those whom wish to stop our Grand Master, Darth Pravus."

Adile Zumdahl paused to let the information soak in. "According to an interrogation of a captured Jedi. The information contained on a data card was deposited with a [WA-7 waitress droid](#) at a cantina during his capture by Inquisitorius agents 12 standard hours ago." Adile Zumdahl handed Zul a datapad and motioned to the inbox on the screen. "Exact locations and details have been sent to your datapad." Adile Zumdahl looked up at Zul and spoke. "Good luck on your mission," he said wryly and grinned. "You will need it."

The marine squad commander took his cue, and motioned Zul to the door, He escorted him back to the air lock. Zul takes a quick look around taking in the enormous

ship and thinks to himself. "I really need to get one of these." He laughs under his breath. "One day," he thought.

Back on board the D.S. *Silver Frog*, Zul sat at the helm and attached his data pad to the Nav-Computer. Then he typed in the coordinates to Nar Shaddaa. Clearing the berth of the enormous ship, Zul sendt his Simiyiar to hyperspace.

After some time in hyperspace the Nav-Computer came to life, announcing their arrival in Hutt space. "This is gonna' be great. Not really a fan of Hutt's," Zul said out loud, talking to himself. Zul walked to the cockpit and sat down in the helmsman's seat. He reached over and took his ship out of hyperspace.

Nar Shaddaa, otherwise known as the "Smugglers Moon," came into view as the ship exited hyperspace. Nar Shaddaa was one of the few large breathable moons in the system. The planet, much like Coruscant, was over developed. This caused various levels structures to preside over the planet's surface. The planet was divided into the upper level, mid-level and lower levels. The upper level was mostly noted for its luxury casinos and many various luxury hotels and shopping plazas. Only the keenest of eyes would notice the skullduggery and subterfuge going on right beneath the eyes of the guests.

The mid-level was the housing and warehouse district. Most of the industry was on this level, and was ran by a multitude of vicious gangs that control certain territories. They imposed their own form of tariffs and taxes; Nar Shaddaa is not for the light hearted.

The lower level or the "Lowers" as they were called, were the infrastructure of Nar Shaddaa. Probably the most lethal of areas on the entire planet, and also the most important. The lowers were comprised of all the maintenance and piping of the planet. Large generators, air quality units and water purification structures, all the things needed to make a healthy environment.

After obtaining permission to land in the upper level of the planet, Zul made his way to the coordinates on the datapad, and landed on the appropriate landing bay. He gathered all his needed equipment, a pair of holo-communicators, droid restraining bolt, droid controller and a few other essential items. This included such things as a grappling gun in case of his need for a quick getaway. Zul exited the ship and proceeded to exit the hangar.

Nar Shaddaa, a place he had never been and it was just as he imagined. Bustling and full of excitement, and absolutely stupid people ripe for the picking. Zul shook his head. He exited the central Nar Shaddaa Spaceport only to find an enormous statue of Grakkus the Hutt. Known as a ruler of Hutt Town, Zul expected to see more of this as he ventured throughout the city. A loudspeaker caught Zul's attention and caused him to look up.

Up above him was a congestion of speeders and other various transport vehicles, carrying people from one landing pad to another. Mostly all air taxis. The most intriguing was the Zeppelins or very large blimps that had LED screens embedded in the weave of the fabric on the ships. Loud speakers attached to them made them a very good source of advertisement on the planet. Today was advertising a luxury hotel with a casino and their specials for the week. *Someone must have paid a fortune for that* Thought Zul.

Getting back to business, Zul headed to an Air Taxi and sped off to the cantina in question, in an attempt to get on the trail of his assignment. Zul pulled out his datapad on the trip to the cantina and began to research what it was he was looking for. A WA-7 Waitress droid. "Oh boy!" he exclaimed to himself. There must be a million of these things on the planet. Further reading gave him a very good place to start and a glimmer of hope at completing his assignment.

After an uneventful trip to the Cantina District, Zul exited the taxi and paid the driver his fare. Zul walked over to the speeder rental service and acquired a BARC speeder, one of his favorites. It was a well-known old republic speeder that most all

speeder bikes were modeled after in today's society. Doesn't do well to carry passengers, but that wasn't his mission.

Stowing his gear in the storage compartment, Zul set off to the cantina in question. He was quickly beginning to dislike this planet and he had just got here. For one, it was too large. He very much enjoyed his solitude on his home world of Thyferra. It had everything he needed in close proximity without venturing to the larger cities. Some many minutes later, which seemed like an eternity, he had arrived.

He dismounted the speeder and secured it. He wondered if that would really prevent anyone from stealing it on this planet. Shrugging his shoulders, he continued on his journey and entered the brightly lit cantina. LED lights flashed, loud music from speakers emanated from the walls. The cantina did everything to draw attention to itself as to invite as many guests as possible.

Pushing open the doors, Zul was greeted by two Gamorrean guards. Very gruff no nonsense creatures. They made wonderful bodyguards and doormen and were the Hutt's preferred protection. One such guard halted his entrance and snorted at him. Holding out his hand in expectation of some form of collateral for entrance to the cantina. Zul begrudgingly paid the guard and entrance fee and continued in.

The cantina was full of life, creatures from every walk of the galaxy. Fog machines created the atmosphere. Loud chatter and a live band, some small casino machines and a few places to play Pazaak. *Not a bad place.* thought Zul. Blaster fire ensued immediately after his thought with the occasional scuffle. *I guess I was wrong*, he corrected his last thought. Scanning the cantina Zul looked perceptively for his target. At first glance he saw more than a dozen WA-7 droids.

Going back to his pad he checked to see again where he may get a better chance of finding said droid. Zul jolted forward, nearly falling to the ground. While looking at his datapad he hadn't noticed the shady figures enter the cantina. Without a care, they continued their path to a table near the back. Zul had just been in their way. He looked up at them, and to the right he noticed two out of place characters in the

cantina, discounting all the other unsavory fellows. These two stood out like a sore thumb, their clothes were too neat and tidy. Very trim and properly taken care of. This was definitely not a common site in a cantina.

He wouldn't have thought twice about it had he been in a luxury cantina, but this was not that place. With a careful eye and trying to not be as obvious as possible, Zul made his way nearest the table as he could to get a better look. As luck would have it he saw what he had hoped for.

The sigils of Clan Odan-Urr was clearly emblazoned upon their clothes. He was definitely in the right place. Now he was willing to bet that the WA-7 droid that catered to them was the one he was looking for. Deduction told him they had not acquired what they came looking for, and were waiting for the right time.

Zul decided not to let them gain that opportunity, and watched as the WA-7 droid started to approach the table and take their order. Zul stepped in front of the droid and asked for it to take an order from him. Occupying the droid seemed the best idea. Thinking on his feet he decided to start an argument with the droid when it exclaimed he had to take a seat and another server would take his order. He quickly demanded that the droid get him a sentient being in the form of a supervisor and sent the droid on its way to the back of the cantina.

He followed behind and caught up before it reached the double doors to the kitchen and office areas. He walked through the doors with the droid and dragged it into the first unoccupied room, a storage closet. Pulling out a restraining bolt and attaching it to the droid, the WA-7 quickly became obedient. Zul took the droid caller out of his pouch and instructed the droid to hand him the datacard in question.

After a moment the droid's storage compartment opened up and presented the datacard to Zul. He started to bask in glory at the ease of the successful mission, but his rejoicing was premature. It would appear that he had not counted on the two at the table to follow him in the back, and that they had.

Before him stood someone he could only describe as a Jedi, discounting the fact that she had a lightsaber and was classically dressed in their attire. She appeared to be a novice and was taking her cue from the person beside her. The other, looked the mercenary type, however much more experienced than either of them. Zul guessed him to be at least a professional. Two against one, close quarters combat. Not his cup 'o tea. Thinking on his feet he ordered the droid to run over the two would be assassins.

This bought him enough time to dart out of the storage room and through the back of the kitchen. He raced past the Gotal chef, and Zul couldn't believe how sloppy his actions had been. Then again he had never done this sort of thing before. An idea came to mind. He stopped just as he passed the chef and instructed that the two following behind him were mercenaries, and they had killed the guards at the front door. They wanted the head of the chef who cooked them their poorly tasting meal, giving the impression that they had shot the bar up and were in pursuit of someone that got away. Zul didn't wait to find out if the Gotal had fallen for his ruse. He just knew he needed an exit, and quickly darted away as safe as he could in the slippery kitchen.

From the office, a very large Besalisk stepped out grumbling at all the commotion. Zul darted past and pointed to the people following him. He found the exit, and pushed the door open to the back of the cantina. Racing out without thinking, Zul continued on to escape his would be captors. Again his brashness would fail him, the back of the cantina was not the place for a good escape. A landing pad and storage containers was all that existed in the back. Clearly this was not thought out thoroughly.

Like a cat cornered he did the next thing he could do, look for a way out. He ran to the edge of the railing and peered over the vastness of the ravine and open air. Vehicles passed quickly through the city. Calling upon the force, Zul concentrated and slowed his mind, focusing on the oncoming traffic flow. He had found his escape.. He took a holo-communicator out of his pouch, he held it in his hand as he waited for his

pursuers to breach the door. He turned to face toward them, before falling backwards, making sure they saw him do so.

With the force guiding his actions, he was able to call upon amplified dexterity to allow him to do the acrobatics needed to complete his escape or fall to his ultimate doom. He landed on one vehicle, and successfully jumped again to a nearby oncoming roof covered speeder. He planted one of two holo-communicators on the speeder.

Zul looked around and waited on perfect timing. He was going to leap from the speeder and land on the tier below the cantina. His adrenaline was racing. He had never done this before and kept going. To stop was death and he was not ready to die. Taking his leap of faith jump, he produced the grappling gun at what he could only hope was the right moment and launched the grapple.

Wind was in his face, blowing his long hair to and fro. The speeder moved on, having left him behind to swing as the grapple successfully latched to the railing below the cantina. He reeled himself in and climbed over the rail. He activated the holo-communicator to make his body appear on the speeder as if he were escaping while standing on the vehicle. He pressed record and looped the communication. He set the device down and ran off to the spaceport.

It would seem that he had escaped narrowly but unscathed. He swore never to do this again and boarded the first Air Taxi that would take him to his destination. In transit, Zul checked one of his many pouches for the datacard. It appeared to be undamaged, so he inserted the card into his data pad to confirm that the card was not corrupted. He opened the files and was able to confirm the list in question. He took the card out and replaced it back into his pouch before he turned off his data pad and enjoyed the taxi trip to the Nar Shaddaa spaceport.

Zul exited the taxi after it landed again, paid his fare, and began to walk past the speeder rental area. He stopped and stared at the vendor. He cursed under his breath, Zul approached informing the vendor that his speeder was at the Cantina and would be able to acquire it there. Displeased, the vendor held out his hand in expectation of

compensation for his wasted time on a speeder recovery. Zul reached out to hand the vendor his wage compensation and heard the distinct his of a lightsaber coming to life. Moments after he heard the unmistakable sound of a jet pack landing behind him.

Zul turned to face his opponents. They looked none too happy. He wondered if they had followed his decoy or were just wise enough to know the main way in and out of Nar Shaddaa and took a gamble on finding him here. He pushed the thought from his mind as it was not the time or place to ponder it.

He slid hand into his robes, and pulled his lightsaber out while igniting it. A deep fluorescent purple glow emanated from the hilt of the saber. Zul slid his foot back, getting into the first stance of the Shi-Cho form as he prepared for battle. His Jedi opponent skillfully swung her green glowing lightsaber in a crisscross pattern in attempts to show off and intimidate Zul.

Zul was not amused. He peered over his shoulder glancing at the Merc who was stood cross armed, waiting to be amused by a Jedi duel. "I cannot allow you to leave with that data chip." Beamed the female Jedi. "Nor can I allow you the same." Zul replied. With some concentration, Zul entered battle meditation in preparation for the oncoming assault. Zul lowered his saber leaving himself wide open for attack. Like clockwork the Jedi lurched forward, saber above head.

Zul reached out with the force, lifting his off hand towards the Jedi, and let out a blast purple lighting from his fingertips. Unprepared for such an assault the Jedi was immediately stunned. Zul's next move was to raise his barrier in the expected reaction to what he assumed would be the Mercs action to take arms against him.

To his surprise the Merc did not and only laughed. With a quick flick of the wrist the Merc shot up in the air and shuttled off to destination unknown. Shocked at what he had just seen Zul released his lightning from the Jedi and walked toward her.

Zul could only at this point think that the Merc didn't want to deal with someone that could shoot lightning from his fingertips. Zul however, did not lower his barrier. He

squatted down next the Jedi as she slowly tried to rise and gather herself. Zul raised his hand over her head and let out a quick jolt of lightning sent her into convulsions. "That should do it." Zul said aloud. "She'll be out for some time." He exclaimed to any who listened.

Looking around he saw that an audience had appeared during the commotion and started to disperse shortly after. Zul tossed the creds to the Vendor and went on his way back the Nar Shaddaa spaceport. The rest of his travels were uneventful.

In the cockpit of the *D.S. Silver Frog*, Zul piloted the ship out of the atmosphere and into space. Zul plotted his return trip to the Chief Inspector and engaged the hyperdrive. The *D.S. Silver Frog* shot off to its' destination. Unbeknownst to Zul the Merc followed in pursuit.

While hyperspace Zul had contacted the Ardent Fast Frigate *Veer's Revenge* and informed them of his impending arrival. It wasn't long after that had he exited hyperspace at the Planet Balmorra. Zul piloted his ship to the rally point and waited.

Zul's sensor panel chirped to life with an early detection as ship exited hyperspace. Before Zul could scan to see who it was, the ship was already on top of him sending a barrage of armament at the *D.S. Silver Frog*. Zul started evasive maneuvers and braced for impact of the first oncoming fire. The ship was hit, but not badly, still, Zul couldn't afford another hit like that. The hull wouldn't hold up to the stress. He punched the ship into full speed reverse, as he spun the ship around to face his attacker. Zul fired his Ion cannons at his assailant.

Zul temporarily froze his attacker, though he knew full well that that it wouldn't take long for the ship to recover. Especially now that he saw it was an Alpha-class Xg-1 Star Wing. Otherwise known as an Assault Gunboat. Being that it was half the size of Zul's ship it is much harder to hit. Zul guessed the pilot was not expecting what he did and had been taken by surprise. He could count on the pilot to have better reflexes in the coming space battle.

Zul's comm crackled to life. "Hey there sparky!" said the person on the other end in a witty tone. "We have some unfinished business, you and me." The comms closed, and Zul's ECM panels lit up like a winter tree. He deployed countermeasures for the incoming attack and again did evasive maneuvers. Zul didn't notice the sensor panel light up with all the commotion.

Just as Zul had launched his counter measures, *Veer's Revenge* silently exited hyperspace undetected, as well as both Foray-Class Blockade Runners. They loomed over the Merc and his Alpha-class Xg-1 Star Wing. He didn't have a chance.

Zul's com crackled to life with the welcome voice of the Vice Admiral, who said "I see we arrived in the nick of time Neophyte." He paused. "The Chief would like to speak with you now." The transmission ended without further delay. The last thing Zul saw before he left his ship was the Merc's Assault Ship being tractor beamed and loaded on the *Veer's Revenge*.

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