

Zujenia
Antei Combat Center
<15:28>

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</encrypted message: begin>

Ratling!

Welcome to the team, Zujenia! Mr. Broody McShadow face (Marick, I suppose) has been teaching you the ropes, eh. Blah Blah Blah. That sounds BORING! So, how would you like to get in the field? Wait...never mind, you don't have a choice. Zuji-poo, you're going to go recon the Starburst Casino is run by the Mal company in the Jerem Plaza.

Get the low down for me, kay? Infrastructure-- layout, whatever you call it. Guard and guest's numbers. Exits, Anything we can use to paint a picture.

So, get in your party dress and blend into them fancy smidts, aka, create an alias. Report back to me when the task is completed!

Oh, yeah! Don't be throwing the Force all around, you hear? When operating in Ol'val you have to make sure the folks believe you're as lame as them. So, be careful! And discrete. Or something like that. Poke Broody McMarick if you need help establishing your cover.

K'tana out!

-Gatewardeness
</encrypted>
</end>

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The datapad closed with a click. Zujenia leaned against the metal wall of the hall she had been walking in before the familiar ding of a message had alerted her.

A casino? Me? Undercover in a casino? Certainly there is someone else better suited. Why not Adem? He's already a master of show. She sighed, pushing of the wall and changing her initial path within the Combat Center. *Might as well see if he's in.*

She stopped in front of a metallic door, the plate on it clearly stating it as the office of Combat Master Marick Arconae. Reaching out, Zujenia hesitated before pushing the buzzer to the side

of the door. She was always a little nervous to talk to the man, being an ex-Consul, the combat master, and a trusted close friend of Atyiru's.

"Come in." a voice spoke through the speakers set above the buzzer, a mechanical hum catching it. The door clicked as she turned the handle, opening the door to a pristine and organized room. Marick was a man of order and everything had its place, pens neatly in a small cup on the corner of the desk, arranged by height and color. Books laid in meticulous order upon an even and well crafted bookshelf.

A man in grey robes was leaning against the front of the desk, finger swiping across the screen of his datapad as he appeared to scan through what most likely was documents and files. With a snap of the wrist, Marick both acknowledged Zujenia and motioned for her to take a seat in an upholstered chair a couple meters away from him. Although the Arconae wasn't watching her, she knew he was paying close attention to her actions, the micro-hesitation in her step, the slow glance around the room, the centimeter long tear in her vest from her sparring an hour ago. Closing the datapad with a click, he settled it beside him, placing both of his hands on the desk's edge while he turned towards the Half-Ryn.

"What can I do for you?"

"I...I've received my first mission from K'tana." Zujenia swallowed. "She informed me that I should seek your advice in setting up an alias for it."

"...And your mission?" Marick inquired after a moment. Zujenia unhooked her own device from her belt. Pulling the message up, she handed it over to the Elder. His eyes darted quickly over the screen before giving the datapad back.

"A straightforward recon mission. Your shadow training should come handy." His eyes flashed as he lifted his head. "You have been completing the program I gave you, correct?"

"Yes, sir" Zujenia nodded, fighting back a stutter.

"Then you have the capability to adjust some of your facial features. Demonstrate." A wave of his hand signaled the command. The Hunter passed her own over her nose, removing a jewel-like, chitinous tip from view. Marick nodded with mild satisfaction of the progress she's made.

"Facelifting your nose would be wise, doing so makes you appear closer to near-Human. Change your hair, add some makeup, etc." The Half-Ryn must have made a slight face as the Combat Master raised an eyebrow. She swore she saw an amused glint in his eye.

"Zujenia, do you doubt your ability to perform this task?" She shifted in her seat ever so slightly.

“Er..no, sir...It’s just. I can’t help but think there are others more suited for the job.” Zujenia forced herself to hold his gaze. Marick’s face harden in stern serious as he locked with her eyes.

“Our Gatewardeness, wouldn’t have chosen you if you weren’t able. You must learn how to adapt to whatever situation is handed to you. As a Shadow Gate member, you will be thrown into mission that push you past your limits and abilities, both physically and mentally.” Marick exhaled with a short nod. “But back to the matter at hand. Your alias.”

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**Selen**  
**Zujenia’s Quarters**  
**<18:34>**

Hands dropped the keys that had dangled precariously from their fingertips. They fell to the ground with a clatter as the Half-Ryn picked up a large rectangle box. It’s cardboard blue and white surface held no clues to who sent it, no sprawling writing or dangling tags. Zujenia settled it upon the kitchen counter off to the left side of her main room. Running her thumb across the edge of the lid, she popped them under and leveraged them against the tape. It broke free with a pop and she gingerly lifted it.

Revealed from beneath was a gorgeous, black satin dress. Micro, sparkling jewels sprinkled across the strapless folded top. A sparkle lit in her dark amber eyes before she blinked, brushing aside her awement and resuming her search for the sender. It worried her that someone had managed to sneak in and deposit this without any issues or her notice. A card clattered off of the long gown when Zujenia lifted it. Bending down, she picked it up, reading:

**ZUJUBEAN!!!**

*Here’s a little mission care project! Consider it a gift! I ~~ordered~~ found out from K’tana about your first assignment. Casino? Well, then this will help you blend in, not to mention it would look fabulous on it. Psst! I was going to give it to you later for the Selen Summer ball, but figured now was a good time. Have fun my little apprentice!*

*Kisses,  
Atyiru*

Zujenia’s jaw dropped. She was enthralled for the gift, but yet she wished the Consul hadn’t. Not only that, but a sense of early dread for the likely forced attendance to the ball. With a sigh, she turned her focus back to the matter at hand. She pulled out the rest of the box’s contents, elbow length gloves, a silver jewelry set, and a pair of strappy high heels. The Hunter groaned at the 6” heels, much preferring the flat souls of her usual boots.

*I suppose it could be worse.* She grabbed a duffel bag and shoved the articles of clothing into her bag. Before the dress followed suit, Zujenia made her way over to a full-length mirror, laying the material against her, admiring it. It cut away at knee-length, dropping down to trail on the floor in the back.

*\*Tsk!\**

Zujenia stomped back to the bag and tossed the gown haphazardly into it.

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**Port Ol'val**  
**Starburst Casino**  
**<20:19>**

Golden eyes scanned the bustling atmosphere of the casino. Slot machines lined the small enclaves set into the walls beyond pillared arches. Roughly 50 gambling tables were organized within the main hall and a round a raised circular stage in the center. Lights flashed above, akin to a low-key club ambience, and highlighted the hundreds of patrons shouting, cheering, and regretting throughout the casino.

Zujenia's finger wiped a bead of condensation from her glass as she took this all in from her seat at a table nestled between both the bar and the in-house restaurant. Her thick white hair was pinned up in a braided bun, delicate strands hanging down to frame her oval face. The young woman had even, much to her surprise, manage to paint on some makeup that buffed her natural beauty. Atyiru had a good eye. The gown drew any onlookers focus to just the right places and away from others, making it easier for the Half-Ryn to hide her tail.

Taking a sip of the bronze liquid, she noted the ten security guards pacing the main tract, path on which the patrons followed. Her gaze was drawn upwards, though, to a set of decorated, metal doors heavily posted with two well muscled men based on the bulk under their suits. Lost in her analyses, Zujenia missed the white-clad man who invited himself into the seat beside her.

"And to think my fortunes couldn't get any better tonight, coming across a gem such as yourself." The slight draw in his voice caught her ear and the Arconan turned to find a well-enough looking Human beside him. His dark hair was combed to a spike in the front and green eyes flashed as he flipped his red tie over his shoulder.

"Care that I sit here?" he hummed, "I have a reputation for livening the evening."

Zujenia withheld an inner groan as he winked, flashing back a bright yet shyish smile.

“Perhaps. Depends on your resolve in tempting Lady Luck.” she jested. “I’m sure she would feel scorn for one of her handsome followers to stand beside another woman.”

And cue eye bat. Zuj wanted to vomit, but her flirtatious interaction was flowing more smoothly than she had expected. A light chuckle dripping with cockyness stiffened her tail as the man leaned in closer. He lifted his hand up to push a strand of stark hair behind her ear.

“Oh, I’m sure I can bring her back to my side, but first. Would you care to accompany me? I could use a lovely accessory such as yourself.”

It took all of Zujenia’s will to not swipe his hand away and follow up afterwards with a punch to the face. Instead, she forced her face to hold its pleasant demeanor, reaching out to take his offered hand.

“I would love to.”

“The name’s Antone. And, yours?” He inquired as he gently pulled her to her feet. Zujenia let her arm rest on his while flashing him a smile.

“Reinia.”

“Well, Reinia,” Antone waved a small black and white rectangular card, “Are you bored of the drab scenery here?”

Zujenia, ‘Reinia’, grinned, her game played out and it looks like some doors will be opening up for her.

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A quiet chime sounded as the metal double-doors slid open, the guards having nodded the couple in. The room before them was a large lounge decorated with some of the most finely upholstered furniture and artisan vases. Four patrons were chatting in there, a man and woman resting on a floral loveseat, two men were laughing by a table with champagne.

Zujenia flicked her gaze at the corners of the ceiling, one, two security cameras. She needed to ditch this fella, but she had to find an area without the lovely watchful eyes. Turning towards Antone, she laid a hand upon his chest, leaning against him.

“Antone...Let’s go somewhere, just the two of us?” She stared into his eyes while biting her lower lip.

“Reinia?...Oh, er, yes.” He cleared his throat seemingly taken aback by the abruptness of her request. “I know just the place.”

The Human lead her into an equally decorated hall. A few meters down, he turned, swiping his card through a slot on a door. At the cue of a green light, he pushed the door ajar, leading her smoothly inside.

“Here, let me help you with your necklace.” He circled her, his fingers moving swiftly to unclasp the jewelry. His touch brushed against her skin and she froze slightly. Sensing this, Antone must have thought she was getting cold feet, needing a little encouragement, because he leaned down planting a kiss on her birthmarked, right shoulder.

Zujenia whipped around, elbow smacking him square to the jaw. Using her momentum, she continue her spin and brought down upon him a well-placed kick, the blow dropping him into unconsciousness. With a huff, the half-Ryn adjusted her top and pushing back the strands of hair in her face. She retrieved her necklace, removed his identification and V.I.P. card, and shoved him into a small closet in the rear of the room, arms bound and mouth gagged. Grabbing a *‘Do Not Disturb’* sign, she exited, hanging it on the door. A Grey haired man paused, watching her when she turned. Zujenia flashed him a wink, causing a chuckle to arise out of him. They parted their ways, allowing the Hunter to relax a bit of her anxiety.

Ducking into a small alcove, she hugged the inside of a corner, hidden from view. Closing her eyes, she reached out and grasped the Force, pulling it around her to blanket herself with shadows and light until she was invisible to the naked eye. Zujenia quietly proceeded down the twisting series of the hall, noting the various rooms, lounges, and higher class clients.

A gradual din rose as she rounded a corner. Three heavily muscled guards stood in front of an two open, white doors. Past them, in the smoke-filled room was a cluster of gambling tables. Shady figures laughed as they throw down their cards or another wad of money. Women adorned their sides, some wore smug looks and nightgowns, others flashed lecherous smiles and swayed their hips within scantily clad outfits.

The acidic smell of the cigars’ smoke burned the inside of her nose, causing her to sneeze which blew away her ghostly cover. Thankfully, she had been hugging a corner in which her sneeze through her back against. Within a moment, one of the taller guards had rounded it, coming face to face with her.

“Bless you miss,” his deep voice rumbled.

“Why, thank you.” Zujenia replied accepting a handkerchief from the man. Human, like all of the other guards.

“Can we help you with something? Are you lost?” His eyes flickered from her to behind his shoulder. His voice charitable, but echoed his desire for her to move on her way. Fear and curiosity tugged at her as she thought about the knowledge she could gather from that room, appearing to be some underground gambling center.

“Actually, uh. I’m suppose to meet a fella here tonight. Business.” The guard raised an eye and held his hand out, waiting. She sighed, “You’ve got me. Truth be told, I’m here as a gift for one of the fellas in there. Some chap showed up and gave me a wad of cash to entertain his buddy, didn’t give me names, but a description.”

The bodyguard tsk slightly before speaking into his earpiece. A moment later, he lead her over to the room’s entrance.

“Which one?” Zujenia glanced around the room before settling on one fella at one of tables near the right wall.

“Black suit and loosen tie, triangle cuffs, tossed brown hair. He fits the description.”

“Alright, you’re free to go.”

Her heart beat in her chest as she stepped past the threshold, her dress billowing out behind her. Yellow eyes locked with the less-than-honorable gambler, she lifted her torso as she neared, enticingly. Halting beside the besheveled man, his arm making quick time to wrap around her waist.

“Hey, handsome. Heard you could use a bit of company tonight --oh!” Zujenia’s breath drew sharp as he swiftly pulled her down, drinking in her scent. The Half-Ryn quickly recovered throwing on a saucy grin.

“I don’t know who sent ya, but I ain’t gonna turn ya away either.”

It seemed like hours past. Zujenia tried to maintain a relaxed state, having to call upon the Force to focus. Her nerves screamed for her to jump away from him, his touch. These ebbed with the sensation of power smoothing out her emotions. The gatekeeper wrote a mental note of the security in the room, the amount of men, cameras, any alarms. She knew this section of the Starburst Casinos would likely be of high interest to her battle team leader especially by the looks of the players here. Suited, but not the same style as a noble would, the way they carried themselves, the separate individuals that stood silently beside some of them, even the vibe in the air suggested they were of criminal type. Mob? Gang?

Her attention was warped back to her ‘client’ who had just shot an arm up in rejoice. She clapped and smile, leaning in to give him a kiss, before joining the laughter.

“Danny, man. I need to get one of those!” A stout swine of a human pointed a grubby finger her way. “Yer luck her tripled since she arrived. *Heh heh*. Exotic on the eyes too.”

“Maybe that’s were your issues lie, Trenor. Human lasses just don’t have that edge these days.” Danny gave a cocky shrug before pulling Zujenia in for a showy kiss. She gasped for breath, flushed. The taste of cigar lingered in her mouth adding to the urge to upend the contents of her stomach as she sat upright.

A chill ran across her back, she could feel the cool and dark gaze upon her. The Half-Ryn slowly looked over her shoulder, locking onto the steel eyes of a Human male dressed in black. He was tall and lithe, holding himself in a dignified posture. Grey hairs mixed in stylishly with his dirty blond hair which parted on the left. A thin goatee and mustache was trimmed on his chin. Those eyes, however, tore into her, depositing a growing sense of dread and terror. Zujenia didn’t want to be here no longer. If she stared any longer, he would swallow her whole.

A hard suck on her neck ripped her from the locked encounter, as Donny worked his ‘magic’. A groan escaped her mouth which fished out a lecherous grin from him. He must of mistook it as a sound of pleasure. Pushing her to her feet, he stood giving the table a good thud of his hand.

“See ya later chaps! I gotta date with this delicacy.” He growled towards the Half-Ryn, or the Pantoran mutt in their eyes. Zujenia didn’t think she would be so happy to leave with the scum, but she did not want to stick around with that individual. She glanced back at the man who had motioned to a muscular man beside him. The two spoke with an occasional glance towards her. She whipped her head forward and clung to her escortee’s arm.

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The Hunter wiped her hands clean, Donny-boy was now sleeping in an early granted bedtime. Closing the door to the janitor closet, Zujenia continued on her way. Her clock was ticking down, who knew how much time she had left here before her lucked ran out. Or for the goons of that man to come. She made her way back towards the main casino hall. As she rounded the corner to the last hall leading to the V.I.P. Lounge, she was greeted with a scene of five guards and a groaning, head-holding Antone. He lifted his chin to answer a question when he caught a glimpse of her.

“That’s her!” he hollered, pointing.

The security pulled their blasters, commanding her to freeze. Swiftly, Zujenia darted back around the corner and against the inside wall. Footsteps alerted her to them chasing after her. The first guard rounded the corner. Zujenia shot out her arm under his and planted her hand across the back of his neck, leveraging the gun to the ceiling. Simultaneously, she stepped behind his foreleg, using his own moment to slam him to the floor.

Spinning, she nearly avoided a blaster before slipping through the next man’s defenses, sweeping his feet out from under him with one quick sweep. Waves of warning flashed through her spine, alerting her to three on coming bolts. Weaving and ducking, she narrowly missed the

blaster shots. The Hunter dispatched the third one and twisted gracefully to deal with the fourth. As she lunged forward to disarm him, he fired on last shot that scorched the top of her right shoulder, sending a gasp of pain from Zujenia.

Just as she recovered, the guard brought his blaster hand down across her back sending her sprawled onto the tiles. He brought his leg forward to kick her. Zujenia steeled herself, taking the blow in order to wrap her arms around the limb. Using her own legs, she tripped the fella and, in a circular motion, brought her elbow down upon the back of his head.

Jumping to her feet, she could hear reinforcements coming. Guard #5 must have gathered help. Wincing to the pain in her shoulder, Zujenia pulled out Anton's card and slid into one of those small private rooms. Eyes frantically searched for something, anything she could use. A large metal grate near the ceiling caught her eye. Another groan escaped her that evening as she grudgingly set her escape route. Into the vents she goes...

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Panting as shoots of pain molested her arm and shoulder, Zujenia leaned against the cool brick of an alleyway. She gingerly touched her shoulder, her hand coming back with dried, crusted blood. It was only a shallow graze, most of the wound cauterized from the blast. Gritting her teeth, she moved over to a fire escape, scaling it slowly with short gasps of breath. Reaching the 3rd level, she crouched and peered into the window. No signs of movements. Jabbing a jagged piece of metal she had found under the frame, she busted the lock and entered Kord's Ol'val apartment.

Confident the Ryn was indeed not home, Zujenia took in the state of her gown. It was tattered, torned, and sullied beyond recognition. It did little to cover herself as it hang barely onto her form.

So much for wearing that to the ball. She let out a little chuckle. *Guess I don't get to go now, huh.*

Her laughter caused her wound to flare up again, guiding her attention to her needs. The Half-Ryn discarded the black rags onto the floor and fished out some clean clothes from Kord's basket. Thankfully, he had something with a stretchy waistband or she would have had to commandeer his sheet to cover those hips. She made quick use of his refreshers, showering the dust, blood, and dirt off, as well as flushing her wounds. A quick search of his cabinets procured some bandages and a piece of fruit.

Ding

Zujenia lifted her head from her snack, her wound, having grown numbed, now wrapped. She was drawn to the destroyed dress where a soft glow was slipping from beneath the folds.

Standing she picked up her datapad, she had forgotten it was strapped to her thigh all evening, hadn't even been aware she'd took it off.

A message from K'tana...huh, that was quicker than expected.

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</encrypted message: begin>

Zuji,

How'd it go? >:(not quiet enough I see. I'm getting feeds across the holostream about a woman miscreant breaking in and leaving with naught but a man's V.I.P. card. ---Proud of ya! But don't do it again.

Anywho. Get back to Selen pronto! I want you debriefed and rested before your next mission. You've past my little test. Now it's time for a bigger gig, chickee. How do you feel about group tattoos? eh?--Anywho! I'll tell you more in my office.

K'tana out!

-Gatewardeness

</encrypted>

</end>

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Click

I...don't think I'll ever understand that woman. First reprimand me, than complimented me? For frak sakes.

The gatekeeper sighed and pulled on a long sleeve shirt, grimacing as it tugged against her shoulder. As she finished tucking her tail into the sweats, the sound of a key jangling in the lock froze her. It paused for a moment, likely Kord had sensed her--a presence. Tossing her towel towards the bathroom, Zujenia slipped out the still ajar window just in time as Kordath open his door a microsecond later.

The Ryn flipped on his light, taking in the tattered clothes, thrown towel, and forgotten fruit peel. Rushing to the open window, he barely caught a glance of white hair before it disappeared with the Force. A wide ass grin planted on his face as he hollered:

"Oi! Luv, next time stay awhile!"

Heh...yeah, maybe next time. Right now, I got a crazed Twi'lek to satisfy. Selen, I come.