ACE: Boring Conversation Anyway (Prompt #1)

Adept Seraine “Erinyes” Ténama

[Scene 1: Zxyl brings Erinyes a message from Atra, requesting help shutting down businesses that are interfering with ACE’s operations.]

“The target for this operation is a company called Lorendal Biotech, based on Lantillies. They’ve been cutting into ACE’s medtech sales along the Perlemian Trade Route rimward of Taanab. Ventus wants them shut down,” Venzos said.

Erinyes shrugged. “Good for him. What’s in it for me?”

“Distribution rights for that same medtech in the Anoat Sector.”

“Knowing Ventus, he’ll make us send freighters to Eriadu to pick the stuff up. If we’re burning the extra fuel, I want the Seswenna Sector, too.”

The Proconsul sighed. “I’ll talk to him. Anoat isn’t a bad deal on its own, though. Everyone on Bespin’s willing to pay a premium for that kind of stuff,” he pointed out.

“Whose side are you on, anyway?” Erinyes unscrewed her flask and took a gulp.

“I said I’ll talk to him. I know who pays my fees.” Venzos reached up to rub the back of his neck. “I have to give him an answer by the end of the day, though. If you’re not willing to do it, he’s got a bunch of other people to contact.”

“Fine, but he’ll owe me– actually, no, just tell him I’ll do it.” In Erinyes’ experience, trying to hold anything over a Dark Councillor’s head—even a legitimately-owed favour—never ended well. Better to just call a deal a deal.

Venzos nodded and tapped something into his datapad. “I’ll tell him. Oh, and no glowbats or spoonbender tricks, either.”

Erinyes quirked an eyebrow. “Since when do you get to tell me how to do my job?”

“It’s Ventus, not me. He doesn’t want anyone to know that the Brotherhood’s behind these assignments, and security camera footage of someone waving a laser sword around is a pretty good sign that we’re involved. If you don’t think you can pull that off…” Venzos shrugged.

“I don’t know why I put up with this,” Erinyes sighed to the ceiling. “Next time, you tell me things like that *before* I decide whether to take the job. Are there any other relevant details I need to know about?”

“Address of the company headquarters, some data on their assets, just the usual junk. I’ll send it to your terminal.” Venzos tapped a few more keys on his datapad, and a notification flashed across Erinyes’ desktop display.

“Fine. If there’s nothing else, I need to finish reading this budget report, then pack for my trip,” Erinyes said, letting a hint of irritation seep into her tone. In the short time since joining the Taldryan Summit, Venzos had already learned that hearing *that* edge in his Consul’s voice meant it was time to make himself scarce, and the Mandalorian rose from his seat and left Erinyes’ office without another word.

As soon as the door shut, Erinyes activated her comlink. “Kiza, prep the *Nightshade* for launch. The Regent wants something broken on Lantillies.”

[Scene 2: Erinyes and Kiza discuss the situation aboard the *Nightshade*, on the way to Lantilles.]

[Scene 3: Erinyes and Kiza arrive on Lantilles, break into Phlax’s shop, and discover the real problem.]

“Y-you can’t just put me out of business! The Hutts will come after you!” Phlax staggered backward, hands raised to ward off another blow, then practically tripped over his chair before he managed to sit down.

Erinyes cracked her knuckles and took another step towards the whimpering Elomin, but stopped when Kiza raised her hand. “What do you mean, the Hutts will come after us?” the Pantoran asked.

“Arok the Hutt uses this outfit to launder credits from his smuggling ops along the Perlemian Run. I used to fly it for ’im myself, until I caught a string of bad luck and CorSec confiscated my ship. I’m better at numbers than I am in a cockpit, so Arok put me to work here until I could make back what I owed him for the ship and cargo. Not that that’ll ever happen, but at least he didn’t space me,” Phlax sighed as he began fussing over his clothes, trying in vain to smooth out the rumple where Erinyes had punched him in the gut.

“How fortunate for you.” Erinyes rubbed the bridge of her nose. “Look, as horrible as all that sounds, we’re here because your trade is cutting into Vent– er, our employer’s profits, and he’s a kriffing lot scarier than an overgrown slug with a bunch of hired goons.”

“He also knows when to delegate,” Kiza cut in, smooth as Tyrian shimmersilk. “Someone with your business acumen stands to make him a great deal of credits, and with the so-called loan payments to the Hutts out of the way, you might even pocket more of it than you do right now. Come on, bru, you’ve got nothing to lose.”

After a moment, Phlax gave up on his tunic and sighed. “Do I have a choice?”

“Not really,” Erinyes said, shrugging. “Now, we need some information and a case of cheap wine.”

“Yes, whatever you can tell us about Arok would be help–” Kiza stopped short and turned to Erinyes. “Wait, what?”

A standard hour later, Phlax threw his hands up in exasperation. “*This* is your plan?”

“It’s not the worst plan she’s ever come up with,” Kiza said drily.

“Trust me, I’m very good at annoying people into getting what I want.” Erinyes grinned. “Once Arok thinks you’re not worth the trouble of dealing with what I could do to with that information, all we have to do is contact your new employer and figure out the financial details.”

“But why are you drinking that? And why did you make your clothes so *rumpled?!*” Phlax had started sputtering in exasperation when he saw Erinyes making herself deliberately unkempt, and the sight of a puddle of wine that the Zeltron refused to let him mop up had nearly sent him into conniptions.

Erinyes lowered the bottle she’d been chugging, her features contorted in a wince. “You’re right, I should’ve at least gotten something Iridonian. Tatooine wine is *awful.*” Seeing Phlax’s stare, she added, “I’m a lot better at *being* drunk than I am at *acting* drunk, and we need Arok to believe this if it’s going to work.”

Kiza nodded. “Don’t worry, I’ll step in if things get too far out of–” The Pantoran stopped when a series of loud bangs came from the front door of the shop. “What was that?”

“Arok’s thugs.” The Elomin slapped his forehead. “I called them when you first got here.”

“They seem helpful.” Kiza rolled her eyes.

Another series of bangs rattled the shop’s front door, with a muffled voice interspersed between them. “*Phlax! Let us in!*”

“I’ve got this.” Erinyes waved the others back, then groaned in disgust as she gulped down the rest of the Tatooine red.

“Remember what the boss said about tricks,” Kiza warned. She gestured for Phlax to get behind something, then followed suit, DL-44 drawn.

“Yeah, whatever.” As Erinyes wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, a deafening clang erupted from the front of the shop. Phlax let out squeak of despair as the door went flying off its hinges, then another as a massive figure—a Dowutin, judging by his chin-horns—filled the entrance.

“Phlax! Why the frak didn’t you open the– who’re you?” The Dowutin glowered down at Erinyes.

“It’s fine, Deen,” the Elomin called out, before Kiza clapped a hand over his mouth.

“We’re yer mate’sh new employerrrsh.” Erinyes swayed and jerked a thumb over her shoulder. “We jus’ came tae give ’im a lift. Youshe can go hame, there’sh nae problem here.”

Deen growled, and his nose wrinkled at the scent of wine coming off Erinyes’ breath. “What’re you talking about? Phlax works for Arok the Hutt.” The Dowutin sneered, clearly intending for his master’s name to intimidate Erinyes into compliance.

The Zeltron tilted her head to one side, brow furrowed in feigned confusion. “Weren’ ye listening? He worksh for *me*.” She pointed to herself for emphasis. “How do ye work for a rock, anyway? Doesh it ask ye to pick it up an’ move it sho birbs daen’t kark on it?”

“Not a rock, *Arok*… Ugh, just get the frak out of here.” Deen strode forward, and once he’d cleared the door, a pair of Weequay enforcers emerged behind him, long-handled vibro-axes in hand. All three of them stopped, however, when Erinyes thrust her free hand out.

“Youse want to go hame and rethink yer livesh.” Erinyes waved her hand as she spoke, her face scrunched up in mock concentration. For a long moment, nobody moved, and silence fell over the shop. “I *shaid*, youshe want to go hame and rethink your livesh,” she repeated, gesturing again.

“The frak is that supposed to mean?” Deen rumbled, taking another step forward and nearly into arm’s reach of Erinyes. Behind him, the two Weequay simply looked at each other and shook their heads in bewilderment.

“It meansh I’m a Jedi, ye daft tit! Have ye nae heard of a Jedi mind trick before?” Erinyes took a step back as Deen approached, pulling a glowrod from her belt and activating it. “Shtay back, or I’ll gut ye!”

The two Weequay began snickering at the sight of the tool, and an unfriendly grin spread across Deen’s face. “Oh, is that your *laser sword?*” His tone practically dripped with sarcasm as another long stride brought him back within reach.

“I warned ye! *Hyah!*” Erinyes slashed downward with the glowrod. The beam moved diagonally across Deen’s chest, with predictable results. Feigning shock, Erinyes stared open-mouthed at the glowrod, then at the Dowutin. “What’re ye *doing*, mate? Ye’re shupposhed to be cut in half!”

“Heh. You’re coming with me, Pinky. The boys always love having a kark-faced Zeltron around. You two, get the other one.” Deen reached out and grabbed Erinyes by the upper arm, dragging her towards the shop’s front door as the Weequay started toward Kiza.

The trip stopped abruptly when Erinyes reversed her grip on the glowrod and smashed its tip into the inside of Deen’s elbow. The Dowutin grunted in pain, and the force of the blow drove him downward, into range of Erinyes’ follow-up strike. The glowrod’s duraplast cover shattered when Erinyes rammed it into one of Deen’s bony cheek-ridges, but the impact was enough to disorient him and force him to release his grip.

Behind the grapplers, Kiza leaned out from cover, and shrill whines and the scent of ozone filled the air. The two Weequay staggered backward as Kiza’s shots hit them square in the chest, then scrambled for cover behind some nearby shelves. One of them didn’t make it before Kiza blasted him again, dropping him for good. Meanwhile, to add insult *and* injury, Erinyes raked her now-broken glowrod over one of Deen’s eyes and down the side of his face. The sharp duraplast didn’t fare well against the Dowutin’s tough hide, but Deen turned his head away by reflex. Erinyes took the opprtunity to smash her empty wine bottle over the back of the Dowutin’s neck, then half-skipped, half-staggered back until she was out of his arm’s reach.

Deen snarled in pain and anger, and reached for his fallen comrade’s vibro-axe. Erinyes did the same, and began to summon the Force to push the weapon out of his reach. Then she remembered her conversation with Zxyl and, determined to wipe away the smug grin her Mandalorian Proconsul had surely been wearing under his helmet, clenched her hand into a fist instead. *“Spoonbender tricks” my ass,* she thought, staring up at the Dowutin as he hefted the pole weapon.

Then, a moment later: *You idiot. This is going to suck ass like a confused hooker.*

It was too late for second thoughts, though; the pole-axe was already swinging in an arc that would take the Zeltron’s head off her shoulders. Erinyes launched herself into a forward roll, rising only to her knees to ensure the axe passed safely overhead. When it had, she tossed her broken glowrod aside and grabbed the weapon in an attempt to disarm Deen. Instead, the Dowutin yanked Erinyes forward and cracked her under the chin with the butt of the haft for her trouble.

Her drunkenness might’ve been fake, but the stars that exploded across Erinyes’ vision as she tumbled to the ground were definitely real. The Force warned her of an incoming attack as Deen limbered the vibro-axe above his head, and Erinyes rolled to one side to avoid being split in two. After all, she reasoned, it wasn’t a “spoonbender trick” if nobody could tell she was using the Force.

Erinyes’ second attempt to disarm Deen, this time by smashing her heel into his wrist, was far more effective than the first. The Dowutin lurched forward in an attempt to grab Erinyes’ ankle, but even drunk, the Zeltron was too fast for him to keep up. Erinyes answered by snapping the toes of both feet into the underside of Deen’s chin as she rolled to a stand. Thanks to Deen’s chin-horns, the kick probably hurt Erinyes as much as it had him—at least one of her toes felt broken enough that she was grateful to have the alcohol numbing her pain—but at least it had given her some room to move. The Zeltron swayed from foot to foot and raised her arms in a guard stance, wrists crooked and her first two fingers on each hand extended, as though she were holding a pair of drinking glasses. “Well, what’re ye waitin’ fer?”

Deen lunged forward with a cross that, if it had connected, would’ve taken Erinyes’ head clean off its shoulders. As the blast came in, the Zeltron bent over backward and deflected Deen’s arm up with a motion that mimicked drinking from a bottle.

[Finish this fight scene, then have Erinyes defer to Kiza for negotiating with the Hutts.]

[Scene 4: Kiza contacts the Hutt representatives, and half-entices, half-browbeats them into letting Phlax go by invoking how annoying and time-consuming it would be to deal with multiple planetary law enforcement agencies digging into the cartel’s activities. Note: She’s not threatening to take the entire cartel down or anything. She’s threatening them with enough inconvenience to become a headache they’d rather not deal with. At the end of the scene, Erinyes, Kiza, and Phlax pack up and leave Lantilles.]

“My name is Mak Tevora. Any messages you have for Lord Arok can go through me.”

[Scene 5: Erinyes annoys Atra.]

“Consul.” The Regent’s features were impassive beneath his beard. “I trust you’re calling about something urgent enough to warrant this interruption.”

“Cheer up, Ventus. You have a new subsidiary: Lorendal Biotech, in the Mytaranor Sector. Drevah’nor Phlax says he’s very grateful that ACE stepped in to rescue him from the Hutt Clan’s predatory lending practices.”

“The Hutts.” Atra’s eyes narrowed, and Erinyes saw a glint of something in them, though she wasn’t quite sure what it was. Damned emotionless Umbarans. “You mean to tell me that your efforts have drawn Arx Capital Exchange to the notice of the largest criminal syndicate with the fattest purses in the known galaxy, as *competition*.”

“No, we’ve drawn their attention to some crazy Zeltron broad who thinks she’s a Jedi and *really* likes bacta and Elomin, employed by anonymous parties with just enough slicing expertise to make covering their tracks too unprofitable to be worth the trouble. Come on, I’m not always as ditzy as I look.”