I’ve Heard Tales of Your Kind

Competition Entry

Seer Raziel

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Pin 11584

 A hush fell over the Cantina when the door swung open. People didn’t come in much after dark, so the fact that a visitor arrived at all was a big enough deal. The way that visitor looked marked the occasion as that much more unusual. Bigger than the average malnourished local, the interloper had salt and pepper hair and beard with heavy emphasis on the salt, peeking out under their hood. This visitor wore smooth charcoal gray armor under a long cloak, and it was clear they carried weapons aplenty, including the lightsaber of a Jedi.

 “People are dying,” the visitor said, his rich tenor voice ringing out over the hushed room. “There’s credits for whoever who can tell me who’s paying the most to handle the probem.”

 One of the patrons, a Nikto that was bigger than the rest of the clientele, snorted. “Board’s over there, read it yourself.”

 The visitor turned to more fully face the mouthy patron, and held there a beat before striding that direction with purpose. “You know, I would, except,” he began, and then drew his hood back, exposing eyes wrapped in midnight blue Ottegan silk. “I just got my eyes dilated. Maybe you could help an old man out?”

 It certainly wasn’t the words that shook the sassy Nikto to his core. It was the tone, the easy calm that did it. “Right, yeah. You mentioned credits?”

 “Yeah, hundred it in for you. Enough for dinner to go with that rotgut.”

 The Nikto got himself to his feet and gestured towards the board, pausing a minute to see the visitor’s reaction. When he followed, the Nikto continued speaking, this time with a far more respectful tone. “So, I’m Kreg, nice to meet you.”

 “Kreg? I’m Raziel,” he replied plainly. “What’s this mudhole’s story anyway?”

 “You nailed it with mudhole. We’re nothing but a mining colony, and not even a special one. Ambassador Hach’s family owns the company, and the company all but owns us.” Kreg shrugged to punctuate his answer. “Still, could be worse. It ain’t Kessel, and they pay us in creds instead of scrip.”

 Raziel gestured towards the board. “All the better to keep people from starting trouble. Which one is mine?”

 “Ours, old man. You ever been to Litenev Six?” When Raziel shook his head, Kreg continued. “Well I grew up here, know this place inside and out. You wanna hunt whatever this is, fine. You got the laser sword, I don’t. I ain’t gonna let you go at it blind,”

There was a pause pregnant enough one could expect it carrying quintuplets. “Figuratively blind anyway. 20 percent and I’m your guide.”

“Ten, and this isn’t a negotiation. Take it or leave it. People are going to keep dying until I commence killing whatever’s responsible.”

“Yeah, okay, ten’s good. So the listing here says, wait, this can’t be right.”

“You’re keeping me in suspense,” Raziel deadpanned with a frown.

“Says there’s twenty thou from the Ambassador himself. This wasn’t posted yesterday, it’s new. There’s contact information as well.”

Raziel reached out and grabbed the flimsiplast posting, holding it carefully between his hands. “Shh,” he instructed, and let himself become open to the living Force. Gradually, the feelings that permeated the missive began to reveal themselves. Confusion and excitement, most certainly Kreg’s impressions, but below that, something darker. Hatred, anger, revenge, sorrow, loss and emptiness.

“This is personal. The Ambassador has more than pride at stake.” Raziel sighed and stuffed the flimsi into a belt bag. “Someone close to them died.”

 “Voren Hach is a widower, only family he has on-world is, oh wow. Sorry, only family he got is his daughter Iilla. If she died it’s a bad day here. Iilla’s the only hope most folk have here. We all love her. I really hope it’s his dog that bought it and not her.”

 The feelings and emotions from Kreg were indicative enough to illustrate just how beloved this Iilla was, and it told Raziel plenty. “Keep some hope alive, but don’t be shocked if it was her. Only the Hutts put 20 out for pet revenge.”

 “Yeah, damn, you’re right. We’ve got a small medcenter, closest thing to a coroner is there. You have a speeder?” Kreg asked, already grabbing his jacket from the back of his seat as he steered Raziel towards the door.

 “Yeah, I got a speeder. I got feet too, how far is it? I’m not wasting fuel to be lazy.”

 “Okay, okay, it’s about two klicks. That far enough for a ride?”

 “Nope, barely far enough for exercise. Let’s go, and don’t forget your tab.”

 “So, this is the place,” Kreg said, nodding towards the medcenter, something one could only say if they were feeling extremely generous. Much like the rest of the settlement, it was hastily thrown together from shipping containers, and was only vaguely more important looking than the rest of the dimly lit town. “You’ll find Doc Spiz inside. Just, be warned, he’s a crusty old bastard.

 “My kind of people. You not coming in?” Raziel asked, noticing Kreg was taking a lean against one of the few lampposts in town and trying hard to look like someone from a noir themed holodrama. He took the time to slide the clip holding his lightsaber to behind his right hip. No sense in alarming the doc.

 “No, I owe the Doc some money. I’ll pay him with my cut, but he ain’t wanna see me till I have creds in hand. I’ll just wait out here and enjoy my cigarillo.”

 “Yeah, fine. Don’t run off. I’m going to want to talk to Hach next.” Raziel instructed, and turned to enter the medcenter. Much like the outside, there was nothing remarkable about the interior. A few chairs, a desk with a protocol droid permanently attached, and a pair of vending machines. The smell, however, improved Raziel’s opinion. Good, strong disinfectant was used, and recently.

 “Unless this is an emergency, Doctor Spiz is not seeing patients until 0900 tomorrow. May I take your name and symptoms?” The droid’s voice was female encoded, and more than pleasant enough. The quality was top notch too, someone spent good money on a nice voxbox.

 “I’m here to consult with the Doc on a matter of community health,” Raziel answered, pacing his speech slow to buy himself enough time to come up with a plausible way to get the droid to page the Doc that wasn’t a lie. He didn’t need an angry physician to deal with, especially when they had answers he needed.

 “One moment. May I ask who you are?”

 “Raziel. No last name. You can tell him this won’t keep him long.”

 “Very good. I have paged his commlink. The Doctor will arrive shortly. Please take a seat if you would like, or enjoy refreshment from our vending machines. They have been recently stocked.”

 “Now that, that I’ll do,” Raziel headed that way and paused at the machines. “Handicap assistance available?”

 “How may I assist?” The droid asked, only its head turning to look at him, which was somehow creepier than it just being a waist-up machine bolted to a desk.

 “Canned caf in this machine?”

 “Yes, fourth selection from the top. We only have cold preparation available however. The patient available carafe has been taken for cleaning.”

 “Careful, the stuff’ll kill you,” Raziel heard from behind him, though the warning did nothing to pause him from calling up a can of caf. “You’re with public health? Look like a Mando to me.”

 “No, I’m no Mandalorian,” Raziel answered patiently. If he had a cred for every time he’d been asked, he wouldn’t be taking bounties to fuel his ship up. “But bodies are dropping. I’m interested in preventing more of that, maybe take some work off your hands.”

 “You coulda told the droid that,” Spiz said, and something about his accent was bothering Raziel. He couldn’t place it, but there was familiarity there. “I woudn’t have lollygagged as much.”

 “I got all night, nobody to fuel my ship till tomorrow morning.”

 “Yeah, they don’t let you pump your own. Probably so you don’t notice them skimming on how they measure a liter. Follow me to the cooler and we can talk about this situation.”

 That had done it, he’d said enough. “Coruscanti?” Raziel asked, following the doc, who was lean and healthy for his age, but carried enough experience in his persona for several lifetimes.

 “Corellian. Did my med school on Coruscant. Good ear.”

 “Too old to be a clone. Regular army?”

 “Fleet actually. What about you? Too young to be a Clone Wars vet. Empire, Republic?”

 “Neither,” Raziel replied, still following the doc as they went into the basement, where the temperature had indeed dipped several comfortable degrees. “Just a sap on the fringe.”

 “Well, welcome to another drekkin’ part of the fringe. Also, welcome to my ‘fridge. I’m assuming you’re here about the most recent victim?”

 “Good assumption, what can you tell me?” Raziel said after taking another drink of his caf. He was going to have to ask what brand it was, the stuff was dangerously tasty.

 “Twi’lek female, nineteen standard years old. She was found early this morning by wildlife control on the edge of the broad orchards. Pathology indicates cause of death to be exsanguination. Physical analysis corroborates that. Seven deep gashes across her back, depths ranging from a couple of millimeters deep to one that was nearly nine centimeters, which nicked several major blood vessels including an artery. No defensive wounds which indicate either she knew her attacker, or was snuck up on.”

 “No bites taken out of her? Not even a nibble.”

 “Minor insect damage to her lekku, nothing on this planet has a mouth that small *and* claws that sharp, so we’re writing that off as post-mortem.”

 “How clean are the cuts?”

 “You know, not even law enforcement asked me that. Clean as a whistle. This wasn’t an animal attack.”

 “You didn’t put that in your report, did you?” Raziel asked, sensing the doctor holding something back.

 “No, I didn’t. Inspector, if you could call her that, Callinine said that it had to be an animal attack given where the body was found. Wildlife control said there was a huge blood patch, so it wasn’t a dump. All I know is, I’m the only doc this town has, so I’m keeping out of the politics.”

 “Can I see the body?”

 “Nope. Family took the remains right after breakfast.”

 That paused Raziel mid-sip. “You said remains very specifically.”

 “I did. They left her effects. Didn’t seem interested in them. You wanna look at those, or more to the point, do you want me to describe them to you?”

 “If I had a cred,” Raziel muttered. The blind jokes got old before he’d even hit puberty. “I can handle what I need.”

 “Alright then, suit yourself,” Spiz said, handing Raziel a small plastic basket.

 Contained within were the usual small trinkets. A wrist chronometer, a couple of rings and a necklace. Raziel ran his fingertips across the things, opening himself up to the Force once more. Nothing at all stood out, there were no strong emotions, and more than that, nothing before her death. It was fast, blindingly so, and painless. Thank the Force for small mercies he supposed. “Yeah, nothing of value here, thanks.”

 “Sure. Just, if you would, be careful. I don’t know what’s going on but I bet the creds ain’t worth it. I don’t like to work much anymore.”

 “Yeah, no promises there Doc. Thanks again for your help and have a good night.” Raziel said, giving a nod and a turn on his booted heel. Already, things in this gig were beginning to stink, and he wasn’t so much a fan of it. Some manner of critter killing and eating people, that was easy to handle, but when people got involved things always got messy. Especially people with agendas.

 “Took you long enough there Raz,” Kreg quipped when he saw him exit the Medcenter. “I was beginning to think you’d decided to take up residence in there.”

 “I ain’t dead yet, c’mon,” Raziel said with a nod, prepared for more hiking.

 “Oh no, we’re not hiking to Hach’s place. It’s thirty klicks the other direction. If you don’t have a speeder, I can call a friend to give us a lift.”

Raziel frowned and dug out the control fob to his speeder. “Could’ve mentioned that sooner,”

“Could’ve, but you didn’t ask.”

“C’mon smartass, my ride’s at the spaceport.”

“Emperor’s black bones!” Kreg screeched, the moment Raziel brought the highly customized Clone Wars era speeder bike to a stop just a dozen meters away from the main gate to a rather large compound. “Where’d you get this speeder bike?”

 “Came with the ship,” Raziel deadpanned as he dismounted. “It’s late, they gonna want company?”

 “I mean, you said you wanted to come here. I’m just your guide.” Kreg shrugged. “They’re probably still up making plans though. Chances are good if you wanna fill the contract, they’ll be excited to see you, and their comm freq is on the notice.”

 Well that sounded reasonable enough. “What’s the sequence?” Raziel asked, digging out his commlink and the notice. He handed bounty to Kreg and lightly ran his thumb across the keypad to find the 5 key.

 “Five zero nine, four zero one, two two point one seven eight,”

 The signal went live, but there was nothing but a soft hum of static for several seconds, before the transmission keyed up. “Can I help you?” an older male voice said, speaking with an accent that marked them as from Ryloth, though it sounded like they hadn’t been there for a while.

 “Yessir, I want to fill the bounty you posted. I know it’s pretty soon but can we talk? The faster we can get after this, the easier the trail is to follow.”

 “Yes of course. My address is on the notice, unless that’s you on the very bright speeder bike?”

 “That’s me,” Raziel said. He was going to say more when the gate swung open. “Okay, well I’ll kill this transmission and come up to you.”

 “Thank you,” the speaker said, and ended the call for him.

 “Okay, let’s do this,” Kreg said, gripping to the speeder as tight as he possibly could. When Raziel grabbed the handles and walked it along on its repulsors, all he could do was shake his head. “Or, this,”

 “I’m liking this less and less. You hear how he sounded on the comm?”

 “Yeah, sounded skittish and he was in a bigger hurry to end the transmission than you were.” Kreg commented, revealing a more observant side than he’d shown before.

 “The doc said things were political, and there was a hasty coverup. I get the feeling the Ambassador isn’t running the conspiracy.” Raziel commented, still walking nice and slow up the winding driveway. Objectively it was beautiful. Lush landscaping that was native to the planet, contributing to the living Force in magnificent ways. Trees, flowers, shrubs, all of it attracting local critters doing what the local critters do.

 “So, what’re you gonna do? I’ve seen enough holovids to know how this usually ends,” Kreg seemed worried when he asked, not altogether surprising there. For the average schlep miner, this kind of business wasn’t exactly common.

 Raziel exhaled a long breath. “It’s never like the holovids. If it were, they wouldn’t make holovids about it, which is a shame, because they make it easy. As for what I’m doing? I don’t know yet. I wanna get a read on the Ambassador, see what kinda man he is. That’ll tell me as much as anything else,”

 “So, I’ll hang out here then again, keep an eye on the bike?” Kreg asked, unclear how he was supposed to guide the guy at this stage in the game.

 “No, I’m leaving it, call it bait. I doubt the ambassador would try anything but that leaves everyone else on this planet to concern myself with,” Raziel kept his same easy pace as they spoke, both in his stride as well as his speech. “So, you’re coming with me. In the saddlebag is a blaster. Since nobody’s said anything I’m guessing there’s no weapon laws here?”

 “Good guess, they don’t care as long as you’re not shooting the place up. I uh, I don’t know how to shoot though,” Kreg said, almost embarrassed sounding.

 “Don’t need to. If you’re shooting, I’ve failed us both. Just keep it on safe and tuck it in your trousers. Does the ambassador know you?”

 No, I’m just a miner,” Kreg said while trying to tuck the pistol into his trousers in such a way that his important parts weren’t getting beaten to death by the barrel of the weapon.

 “Okay good. Just keep quiet unless you’re explaining something local to me,”

 Kreg just nodded and gave a small grunt. They were close enough to the doors that getting into character was important. Surprise of surprises, another protocol droid. It left Raziel wondering if the mining company had a deal with Cybot Galactica.

 “Cee Bee, I have the door!” A voice called out. The speaker was quickly behind, an older orange Twi’lek with teal mottling in a fine suit, he was scurrying to get to the door before the droid could do so much as greet them.

 “Yessir, of course,” the protocol droid said, and quickly stepped aside with as much of a welcoming gesture as his bolted arms could permit. “Please feel welcome sirs.”

 “That’s unnecessary Cee Bee, it’s a beautiful evening, I’ll speak with our guests outdoors.” the Twi’lek, ostensibly the ambassador, shooed the droid away and exited the mansion hastily, but not before closing the door completely behind him.

 “Forgive my rudeness, it’s unbecoming a diplomat, but these are, they’re difficult circumstances.” Hach explained, and even lacking eyes, Raziel could see the tiredness etched on the man’s face. “You’re accepting the bounty?”

 “I am. Defender Raziel of the Jensaarai, at your service.” Raziel introduced himself politely, and crisply, offering his hand as well.

 “Hachal’anam. I’m the Republic ambassador to this sector,” Hach said, giving his full name in proper Twi’lek fashion and giving a firm handshake. “Forgive me, but I’ve never heard of the Jensaarai, is that a mercenary company?”

 “No, but it’s unimportant. I know this is a difficult time for you, but what can you tell me about your daughter’s death?” Raziel asked, his tone carefully modulated to be as patient as possible, given the man had just lost his daughter.

 “She was found dead, and had been cut several times, I’m sorry but that’s all I was told,”

 “Was she in a relationship with anyone? Also did she have any business relationships?”

 Hach shook his head, causing his lekku to sway. “Her girlfriend left the planet to study abroad, and she was an artist with no current commissions,”

 Raziel nodded and contemplated for a moment, taking care to oversell the action for the benefit of the sighted people around him. “Okay, I think that’s it. I’ll be looking into the location where she was recovered,”

 Recovered was a specific word choice, meant to convey hope and closure, and it seemed to work. “Thank you Defender. I cannot tell you what this means to me,” Hach said and turned on his heel to return home.

 Raziel reached out and clapped him on the shoulder. “You’re a tough son of a gun. I’d’ve broken down by now.”

 “Thanks.” Hach replied, and continued indoors.

 The walk down the long driveway was quiet for several long moments, just Raziel and Kreg, and their boots crunching the gravel. Until, that is, Kreg grew tired of the silence. “So, what was with all that? You barely talked to him.”

 “I got all I needed from him. Iilla wasn’t the target. The ambassador was. She was used to make a point.”

 “How’d you figure all that out?” Kreg asked, puzzled.

 Raziel tapped his left ear and turned his head to show the tiny earbud within it. “I planted a bug on Hach. He’s on the comms now telling whoever it is that we just left. He thinks you’re the one in charge, so, enjoy that.”

 “So, this wasn’t a monster, some feral beast that killed Iilla?”

 “No, it *was* a monster. The very worst kind,” Raziel answered, readjusting his lightsaber on his belt for easier reach. “People.”

It was late, well past 0300 when he exited the back door of his place. The lack of streetlights in the hastily constructed mining town left him enveloped in darkness, the better to ply his trade. Things were looking up, meaning the late hour was entirely excuseable. He had creds to collect after all, which put a serious pep in his step.

Until the alleyway lit up in an icy teal with the violent snap-hiss that could be only one thing, the weapon of a Jedi, then that pep in his step faded as fast as he came to a stop in his stride. “How’d you know?” Spiz asked, turning to look at the armored man behind him.

“Easy. You oversold the conspiracy. Never should have mentioned the constable, she was one too many misdirects.”

“Three right turns means you’re heading left,” Spiz said with a frown. “So what now? You arrest me?”

“No, I gave Kreg to the constables. He gets arrested as an accessory,” Raziel said calmly. “You, well, you’re old. How many more years did you really expect to see?”

“More than you Jedi,” Spiz barked, and brought his arm up with a fist pointed towards Raziel. With a shrill whine, three metal discs launched from the device attached to his arm, the razor sharp metal singing in the air.

Such was folly. Immediately Raziel took Krayt’s Crest, turning his hips and shoulders sideways, allowing the movement to swat the first of the Lanvarok discs. It vaporized immediately on contact with the blade, the blade that was already in motion to strike through the second disk in an almost blastball swing. The third disc, he dodged by ducking into a roll which brought him within a meter of the doctor and standing in Krayt’s horn.

“Lanvarok are interesting weapons. Meant to be used by someone who can move things with their mind,” Raziel quipped, before bringing his saber down to strike the offending arm from Spiz’s body. “In the hands of anyone else, they’re a novelty. Oh, stop screaming, you’ll die hoarse.”

Raziel shook his head as the elderly doctor before stomp-kicking him in the abdomen, knocking the wind out and ending the screeching. To fully cement the silence, he reached out with a claw-like gesture with his left hand and watched Spiz suffocate when his trachea was crushed.

“By the way, I’m not a Jedi.”