You realize I’m gonna snap one day, right?

Seer Raziel

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11584

 The most amazing double edged sword in the galaxy wasn’t the duality of the Force, it was the sheer volume of ways one could transact business depending on their location. Cash only, cred accounts required, financing, barter, threats and intimidation, the list went on in ways that even the most dedicated economic scholars might never fully plumb the depths of. Such was the way of things happening in the life of one Jensaarai Defender, Raziel, who was currently on a space station in the Tapani expanse, trying to make enough fuel to get home.

 “The merchant says he is not satisfied with your offer of fifteen thousand and two crates of Tibanna canisters. He says that you must offer additional credits or goods to make the arrangement equitable.” DeeDee said, her high quality vocoder making her sound more organic than most of the actual real organics on the station. She was absolutely worth every ounce of effort it had taken to liberate her from her previous owners.

 Raziel frowned and took a long look at the Ugnaught in front of him. Every bit of verbal sparring they’d engaged in, in an effort to barter fuel, food, and engine components had been one stalemate after the other. Even using the Force to try and divine what would work and what wouldn’t, was an exercise in frustration and futility.

 “Ten thousand, two crates of Tibanna, and a crate of E-11 carbines,” He threw out there, hoping this wouldn’t actually work. He wanted to hold onto the rifles and return them to Kiast, where they could be used for much more pressing purposes. When DeeDee translated it, the aura surrounding the merchant shifted brightly. Of course, *that* offer would work.

 “He provisionally accepts,” DeeDee translated back after what seemed like a lengthy diatribe from the Ugnaught merchant, complete with emphatic gesturing and pointing.

 Raziel glanced at his droid companion. “Provisionally?”

 “He feels this arrangement is not favorable to you, and wishes to balance the deal by making an additional offer. He says his master is renowned at this station for being imminently fair and hopes to make repeat customers through excellent reputation. This merchant would like to offer one Togruta.”

 “One Togruta what? Their carpentry is pretty nice, I could use a new footlocker if that’s what he’s suggesting.”

 DeeDee shook her head. “No Raziel, he offers a *Togruta*. He says she is skilled in many arts including cooking and lovemaking. He suggests she would make a beautiful bride.”

 Raziel frowned and took a swig from the flask at his belt. “DeeDee, ishé mea vanu, malav tot-tot.” he said in Miralukese. Odds were good the merchant spoke Basic just fine and feigned linguistic ignorance to elicit sympathy or superiority from his clientele.

 “Callu, mai vee,” She replied, and scurried off to get the ship warmed up in a quick fast hurry, her internal commlink already connecting to D20 on the Taliahad to inform him that things would be warming up on the station as well, and that quite soon.

 The Ugnaught barked a short statement and gave an openhanded gesture that very plainly conveyed a ‘What the hell buddy?’. Raziel just held up a single index finger on his left hand, giving the merchant pause. That beat was all it took for a cybered up human man to come rushing to the sales counter.

 “It seems negotiations have broken down,” this human said in mock sorrow and concern. “Has my employee offended you sir?”

 Raziel shook his head and took a deep breath. “Your employee? I heard you correctly?”

 “Oh of course sir, I am Lemthis this is my bazaar, all of these merchants work for me. Perhaps you would prefer to transact with a human? Perhaps a female if you’re so inclined?” he all but purred, struggling to recover a ship that had long since set sail in the form of business with Raziel.

 “No, no, that won’t be necessary. I was offered a Togruta, and I had to send my droid back to my ship to make sure we had all necessary accommodation. I rarely transport no other organics besides myself.” Raziel replied disarmingly, struggling with all his will to keep the charade up.

 “Oh, he has offered you Soona? An excellent choice, one I’m sure you won’t regret. Would you like to meet her?”

 “You know, I would love to meet her.” Raziel replied with a predatory grin.

 “Yessir, of course!” Lemthis replied, clearly looking excited that he might yet save the sale. He rushed off in short order to make things happen, leaving Raziel to stand there at the stall.

 Grateful he lacked eyes, the better to not betray his feelings, he began pacing while regulating his breathing to his slow footsteps. This, as he was trained when he was young, was the one moment where too much excitement could lead everything awry. The one moment where the repulsorfield met the road and everything hinged on his continued patience.

 He didn’t want to though, not at all. What he wanted was to act in a manner to make the ancient Sith Lords stand and cheer at his wrath. It wouldn’t do, however. It couldn’t. The way of the Jensaarai, the followers of the hidden truth, could never be that easy.

 Not that he envied the Jedi, who would take no action other than to contemplate their spleen, instead of doing something, *anything* to right the profound wrongness that had been placed in front of him. Also not the way the Jensaarai did business.

 It was something far and away foreign to either philosophy, but perfectly within the methodology of Raziel, that he arrived upon as he paced to control himself. The calming meditation he engaged within was not to cool off, but to bring a rolling boil to a simmer.

 “Sir!” Lemthis called, dragging a person behind him by way of a chain. “Sir, I have Soona for you to meet!”

 “Good,” Raziel replied calmly.

 “Introduce yourself,” Lemthis instructed, giving another tug on her chain. “You may well be meeting your new master. Best to make top impressions.”

 “Yes forgive me,” she purred, in a voice too young to sound that sultry. “I am Soona, and it is deepest honor and privilege to meet you.”

 While he lacked eyes in the traditional biological sense, that didn’t mean he was blind, and what he observed caused him to pause another moment to again force his fury down. “I see you’re dressed to serve,” he commented, remarking on her quite obvious nudity. “Your owner has devoted resources towards your appearance as well, hasn’t he?”

 She blushed, subconsciously shifting her arms to divert attention from her augmented breasts before remembering how to behave in order to avoid the lash. “Yes he has. I hope it pleases you.”

 “And if it doesn’t, I can direct you to the cosmetic surgeon on level eleven. Soona would offer no trouble in submitting to any modifications you may desire, including a skin recolor. She’s currently lavender with pink and white markings. Very feminine if you ask me,” Lemthis remarked, interrupting his slave. “My slaves are also well trained, and unlike many, also educated as you’ve most certainly noticed. She speaks languages, in fact. Literate, and schooled in all of the most important, eh, shall we say, *domestic* arts?”

 “Excellent. I believe I’ll take her,” Raziel replied with forced joviality. “Let’s drink on it. I have the finest in Chandrilan agave ferment.”

 “Ooh, Chandrilan eh?,” Lemthis asked, watching Raziel take another shot from his belt flask.

 Raziel waited before handing his flask over. “One more thing, how do you keep them in line?”

 “Shock collars. Implants are far more expensive and prone to failure. I prefer to invest in my stock, not gamble with them,”

 Seeming satisfied, Raziel handed Lemthis the flask and waited until he took his own swig.

 “Are you okay?” he asked the minute Lemthis began choking on his drink. “Went down sideways on you huh?”

 Still choking and gagging, Lemthis’ hands went to his throat in a terrified rush even as he hit his knees. He was keenly aware of his customer trying to help him, his wide eyes entreating for more help made that pretty clear.

 “Oh hey, no good,” Raziel said, helping Lemthis up to his feet with one hand, before turning him around and whacking him a few good times on the back. “This should help.”

 It didn’t help, not one bit. Lemthis leaned against the vendor table, his cybernetic arm whirring in vain effort to help keep him vertical, before he dropped again, this time quite thoroughly dead.

 “Uhm,” Soona began, not sure what to do with herself. Money hadn’t changed hands after all.

 “There are more of you?” Raziel asked, augmenting himself through the Force to crush the slave collar. The metal of his armor conducted the charge when the capacitor cracked, and the rubber in his boots served to ground it out, leaving Soona unharmed.

 “Yes, uh, Master?” She replied, shaking in a mix of terror and cold. Mostly the terror.

 “Take me to them,” Raziel instructed. “And here, put this on for now.” He removed his cloak, which was several sizes too big for the girl, but it was far warmer and much more demure than her current state of naked.

 “You have a lightsaber, Master?” She asked when she saw the weapon at his belt. “Are you a Jedi? Are you here to free us?”

 “No I’m not a Jedi, yes I’m here to free you, and don’t call me Master, call me Raz if you’d like. I don’t own anyone or anything. Now come on before station security gets here. There’s going to be a fight but I’d prefer it on my terms. When it happens you need to keep the other slaves in line, that’s your job. Stay out of the line of fire, keep together, and we’ll make it out just fine. How many people are we springing?”

 “Five more, but two of us aren’t well,” Soona replied, already leading him away from the market stalls and towards the cargo section of the promenade floor of the station.

 “It’s never easy,” Raziel grumbled. “Okay, well the healthy help the infirm. I can’t stress enough, keep behind me, especially if there’s shooting,” he began, explaining as he thumbed the release on the magnet holding his helmet to his belt. “Oh who am I kidding? There’s definitely going to be shooting.”

 Soona gestured at one of the massive boxes. “They’re in this container,” she said, pulling Raziel’s cloak around her as tightly as she could.

 “Hey!” He shouted when he’d leaned close to the locked container. “Get away from the door!”

 Walls didn’t mean much to a Miraluka, especially relatively thin ones like those found on a shipping container. Once he’d seen that the occupants within had scooted away, Raziel took his lightsaber from his belt, ignited the icy blue blade, and gave a deft swing at the massive padlock, exercising the one Makashi strike he’d ever learned in that moment, and feeling more than a little pretentious for it.

 Even thinking that thought was enough indication that his mood was improving. He was rescuing slaves, killing slavers, and really, that’s all that counted in life, right?

 Once the doors swung open, Raziel stepped inside, icy blue lightsaber illuminating the container for the benefit of anyone not him. Three more females, a Twi’lek, a Zeltron, and a Chiss, and two males, a Human and a Mirilan, were within the container and all of them looked far too young. The auras of the Mirilan and the Chiss were weaker, especially the Chiss woman.

 “Eoulaa felt the lash recently, she won’t be able to walk,” Soona said, shuddering at her own memory of correction.

 “Yeah, I can see that. I might be able to help. Soona, you keep an eye at the door and tell me when the security gets here.” Raziel said, kneeling down next to the Chiss woman.

 “Listen, this isn’t going to make you all better, but I’m going to help you get on your feet. I have medical supplies on my ship but we have to get there, do you understand me?” He said, trying to be as gentle in speech as possible. He knew he could be pretty curt when the situation dictated it.

 “She can’t hear you,” the Zeltron girl said, scooting away from Raziel out of instinct. “She’s deaf. They took out her aural implants when they augmented her.”

 “They make comedy holovids about this,” Raziel muttered, and touched her thoughts with the Force, repeating what he said directly into her mind. The bonus was being able to project emotional undercurrent into the statement, with the goal of putting her at ease. It wouldn’t be much, but some was better than none.

 When she nodded and scooted towards him, he once more tapped into the Force and let it flow through him. In this regard, the Jedi portion of his training was more than evident. Instead of wrestling the energy to the ground in an effort to control it, he instead let it wash through him like a river, and let his contact with the girl bring her along where the gentle touch of the energy that binds the universe together, could bind her together just a little more.

 She’d wrapped her arms around his neck while he focused on trying to accelerate her healing, scooting into him as he knelt beside her. “She trusts him,” the Twi’Lek girl said, sounding surprised.

 “I do too,” Soona answered quietly. She had to raise her voice pretty quickly however. “Raz, sir, those guards you predicted, they’re coming, and they look mad. Lemthis didn’t skimp on their weapons either.”

 “Stang,” Raziel swore, reluctantly releasing the Chiss girl. It was clear she needed the contact, and badly, but right now she needed to be alive to get it, and for better or worse, he’d caught these people up in his turbulence. Chalk up more life disruption to the space wizards.

 “You lot listen to Soona. Soona, you know what to do,” Raziel said as he stepped out of the container, lightsaber hilt in hand.

 “Hey!” he shouted to the apparently well-armed and armored private security. “Right here!”

 He took two more steps and let his lightsaber come alive again, the icy blue blade snapping alight with just the barest brush of his thumb against the activation switch. Snapping it up into Krayt’s horn with a quick flourish, Raziel began approaching the guards. Every trigger pull added more noise to the song, the hum and swish of his saber mixing with the sharp ringing of a deflected bolt, paced to the rhythm of his footfalls as he just kept coming their way.

 “Master is a Jedi?” The Mirilian asked, sounding awed.

 “No, he says he’s not,” Soona said, motioning for the remainder of them to scoot their way out of the container. As Raziel advanced on the guards, using deflected blaster bolts to keep them from fanning out, Soona led the released slaves from point of cover to point of cover.

 “I believe I will actually enjoy serving him,” The Zeltron girl commented, her voice awed and amazed.

 “He says he’ll free us,” Soona remarked, ducking down again as a stray blaster bolt whizzed too close for her own tastes. “And he doesn’t own people,”

 “We’ll see. Do you think he cares for men?” The human asked, pulling the Mirilian along. The fraternity between them was easy to spot.

 “I don’t know Mavren, he may. He didn’t react to me with lust.”

 “I would be offended.”

 “Amalani, you *volunteered* to be sold as a consort when you indebted yourself,” Soona reminded her as they hunkered down behind some machinery. The blaster fire was getting heavier. “And it was refreshing. I almost felt like a person again.”

 “I feel better than I have in some time,” Mavren observed, feeling brave enough to peek over the industrial lathe they were hiding behind. More blaster fire, more batting it back like a game of Blastball. One lucky shot pinged on Raziel’s armor, but it didn’t seem to slow him much. Instead it seemed to encourage him, and that encouragement spurred the escapees.

 “I see someplace else to hide,” he commented, and motioned towards the escapes. Together they crept that way, and each motion towards their next goal seemed so much more encouraging than the last. Even Gallum, who’d been nursing a wounded ankle, seemed not to notice the pain so much.

 “I think I want him to keep us,” Soona finally said, pushing her back tight against the stack of boxes. From this angle they could see between the stacks to better view what was happening, and what that was, invigorated them even more.

 No longer content to just swat bolts, Raziel had taken the offensive. Two orbital turns of his lightsaber guarded his back as he slid towards one of the security guards before the third orbit bisected him handily. The next guard, clearly a battle buddy, fared less well when he tried backpedaling to evade the Raziel’s archangelic wrath. What would have similarly hewn him in half, painlessly and quickly, became two shim cuts across his chest that seared and burned hellishly.

 “We gotta regroup!” another shouted, popping shots with his blaster pistol more to do something than to try and achieve an effect. They were losing and it was obvious. “You two, try and…”

 His command went silent as he was lifted into the air with an unseen hand and flung across the entirety of the cargo bay. That guard’s partner was able to bring his weapon up but found it cut by Raziel’s lightsaber. It caused him to stare blankly at it for a moment, and that blank expression was his death rictus as the lightsaber blade pierced his chest cavity.

 It was perhaps a bit too dramatic, Raziel noted to himself, when he stabbed the guy. They were breaking, but not broken, and one of them was able to line up a shot that struck his armor. The plates ablated most, but unfortunately, not all of the damage, and saying it stung was certainly not strong enough language.

 Through gritted teeth he fought through the pain, bolstered by the Force, and turned to continue killing those who lacked the good sense to drop their weapons and run. It was a small mercy that a couple developed that good sense before the oncoming avalanche that was Raziel got to them. One of them even had the brains to toss his weapon completely aside before running.

 The intelligent survived, the foolish did not. More movement, always advancing, more cuts. More cuts became more silence, and after several horrifying moments, the silence loomed over the cargo bay like a Dark Side pallor.

 “You can come out now. First wave is dead or gone,” Raziel called out, dousing his lightsaber and taking the opportunity to lean against a tall crate. Beneath his helmet sweat was rolling down his face, and the material beneath only barely wicked enough away. His conditioning was excellent, so he wasn’t out of breath, but he was in pain, and growing tired from remaining so open to the Force for so long.

 Soona and Mavren were the first to approach, the latter all but carrying his friend, while Amalani and the unnamed Twi’lek did the same for the Eoulaa. “Is it, is it over?” Soona asked, clutching her borrowed cloak closed for the hundredth time. Just having the agency to maintain her own dignity was beginning to show in her bearing. They couldn’t have been slaves long.

 “If only,” Raziel muttered. “We’re probably clear till we’re out of the bazaar. Then we’ll get jumped on our way to the docks. I can’t keep up the battle meditation either, it’s exhausting. We need another option. I don’t mind dying but I’d rather not if I don’t have to.”

 The Twi’lek girl placed her hand on his arm, turned her eyes up towards him, and spoke broken Basic in a voice so soft and gentle Raziel wasn’t sure she wasn’t speaking telepathically for a minute. “You sacrifice for slaves,”

 Raziel nodded. “I will always sacrifice for us,” he said with clear tone and inflection. In a less hostile environment he would have shown his tattoos, but words would have to do. “Now, let’s steal a speeder and hope we can get close enough to run the rest of the way.”

 “Or,” a voice called out from the door to the cargo bay. “Perhaps we settle this with honor? I don’t expect you’ll comprehend what I mean so allow me to elaborate,”

 This speaker, with a nauseatingly pretentious accent, strode more fully into the cargo bay. Dressed in the peak of haute fashion, and perfectly coiffed blonde hair, the human man cut an impressive and expensive figure. Tall, lean, but with the movements of a fighter, this was no rich boy with an attitude, but instead a rich boy with attitude and training.

 “I am Baron Jellan Kelairic of House Mecetti. My family owns this station, which means *I* own this station. The private security means nothing to me, in fact, I find the security feed to be quite stimulating. However, I can’t have you tearing your way through this station. So, I propose we settle this with honor.” His words were almost flirty, but absolutely oily.

 Raziel came fully up to his feet and gave a ‘get on with it’ gesture. Kelairic frowned but continued. “Very well. You and I will cross blades. If I win, it means I’ve killed you, so I keep the slaves and you’re no longer a problem. If by some happenstance you manage to best me, I’ll call off security and allow you to leave. Equitable?”

 Raziel nodded. As a student of the blade he was well familiar with Tapani Saber rakes. Most were fops with underpowered lightsabers carrying unattuned crystals. Most, but not all, and by this one’s bearing, Raziel had a feeling he was dealing with a higher grade of fop. It didn’t help that he’d exhausted himself keeping the slaves alive, giving the Baron and even better chance of winning. “So, just like that?”

 “Of course. Keep your armor. I assure you my blade is more than adequate to penetrate it,” Kellairic said, and even that sounded greasily suggestive and flirty in the rapiest sort of way.

 Raziel sighed and turned to Soona. “If I die,”

 “Please, don’t. We’re too close to the end of this.”

 “Oh I don’t wanna, but if I do, take care of them.”

 “Yes, Raz sir,” she said and ushered the freed slaves away from the two men.

 “I believe I will open the ceremonies,” the Baron said. He reached to his belt and unclipped his weapon, a saber hilt covered in electrum filigree and capped with an ornate handguard. That old familiar snap-hiss accompanied his verdant blade’s arrival with a flourish, the classic duelist’s salute. “It will be an honor to claim your lightsaber.”

 Raziel similarly ignited his icy blade, the cold blue light spilling across his charcoal armor to reflect in a teal mixture between them. “Shut up and die you little bastard,”

 Immediately the two men set against each other. Kellairic kept his blade in a high guard reminiscent of Makashi while Raziel was back in his standby of Krayt’s Crest. As befitting a student of the fifth form, Raziel opened the hostilities, swinging two orbiting strikes. The first whiffed as Kellairic dipped his blade and leaned away, while the second wasn’t blocked as much as it was rolled against.

 Nimble on his feet, Kellairic capitalized on Raziel’s momentum and pushed inwards but couldn’t gain further as the icy blue blade orbited again, forcing him right back out of the first circle. Raziel finished the motion in Krayt’s eye, the tip of his blade leveled directly at Kellairic’s nose. The second or two of reset allowed him to regather himself and fight his temper into a calm, the kid was too good to just get fully angry at.

 In fact, he was just plain faster, less tired, and just as invested in the situation. Raziel pressed a stab that transitioned into a hook at the last minute, attempting the fling Kellairic’s green blade wide to follow through with a cut from sky to ground but again, he was fighting someone far faster.

 “I should mention I wasn’t just watching for entertainment. I was studying you, and quite frankly, I believe you’re lacking. There’s no grace in your form, armored man. None at all.” Kellairic said, and flicked his saber up and under Raziel’s guard, scoring a shim cut against his bottom forearm. His armor ate the worst of it, but the sudden flashburn seared his arm in ways best described as torturous.

 He wouldn’t give the little poodoo the benefit of even so much as a yelp, and instead took Krayt’s tail and cut ground to sky. As expected, Kellairic didn’t block, he dodged, and tried coming back in again. Just exactly where Raziel wanted him, in kicking distance.

 Or, more properly, close enough to grab. It was risky, but in the short period of engagement, it was evident that Kellairic was reliant on his blade. His footwork was that of a duelist, not a fighter, so when Raziel shoulder checked him, dropped his left hand off his blade, and tossed him by the collar into the wall, it was a sight to behold. Get it?

 “Gutter tactics, not a surprise,” Kellairic said. “You’re certainly where you belong, aren’t you? Among the slaves in the trash market?”

 Raziel’s blade left his guard stance and hung at his side, tip shaking. “I’ve struck a nerve, have I? I do appreciate it when my quarry knows it’s facing a superior opponent.”

 Kellairic approached, carefully, he was no fool, and batted away the ineffectual and emotionally charged swats Raziel threw. He riposted another swing and sunk the tip of his lightfoil into Raziel’s armored shoulder. This time he was rewarded with a grunt.

Two more wide swings from Raziel were dodged and a third was ducked, bringing Kellairic into the second circle, where it was less stabs and more draw cuts, and he set about the task, dragging his blade against Raziel’s abdomen, scoring a deep gash in the metal. In fact, the only thing that kept Raziel alive was his sudden backwards slide, his footwork just as nimble. In a form like Djem So it was crucial.

It was a lesson Kellairic learned far too late as he realized he was off his own footing, his opponent was firmly planted, and in a high guard. He brought his lightfoil up to block the downward shot, but the immense power in the swing couldn’t be stopped, only observed and experienced.

Down came Raziel’s icy blade, battering through Kellairic’s weak defense with such power and ferocity that Kellairic’s own blade turned inward at his wrist, cutting him just as surely as Raziel’s. In a heartbeat, it was over.

“Stang,” Raziel muttered, dousing his blade again, and collecting his fallen opponent’s as well. "Let’s go,” he said to the slaves he’d freed.

It was hours later and the Taliahad was cruising through hyperspace. Raziel sat in the cockpit, his pilot’s chair turned halfway while he continued examining his armor. It was going to take a while to fix. Probably was gonna take a while for his body to fix too.

“I brought you caf,” Soona said, stepping more fully into the cockpit with a steaming mug in her small hands.

“Thanks,” Raziel muttered. He pulled his feet off the copilot’s char and reached over, turning it around to face his and giving Soona a welcoming gesture.

“They’re all resting. It’s very comfortable in here,” she remarked, sitting herself down. Dressed in one of Raziel’s tunics, she was all but in a shift dress and had to take her seat carefully.

“You should be asleep too,” he reminded her before taking a sip of the steaming caf.

“I can’t sleep, not yet. It’s my duty to serve,”

“You’re free Soona. All of you are free. The Jedi Praxeum on Kiast are already aware of my bringing all of you. Better food, fitting clothes, and most importantly, medical care are waiting on you. After that, so is a ride to anywhere safe you wanna go.”

“Yes, I am free, and I thank you for that. This means I am free to serve as I see fit. You don’t see me as a bride, and honestly, that relieves me more than a little, but I see you as someone who needs my help. Your droids are cold machines and you need warmth in your life. And me, I need something in my life too. I need purpose. With the other slaves, I was able to keep them together, keep them from coming apart individually. Without the threat of being sold or worse, I don’t think we have enough in common to get along.”

It wasn’t so much her words. Sure, it was a solid argument, if completely motivated by emotion and survivor’s obligation, but it was the weight, the intense conviction behind her words that really sold it.

“I’m paying you,” Raziel began, but had to stop and set his mug aside when she jumped up and hugged him with a barely restrained squeal. “I’m paying you what you deserve for the work you’ll do, and there *will* be work. You were bought and built to be a consort, but that’s not who you are. I’ll give you the skills and opportunity to find out who that is.”

“I want to know who you are, Raz,” She said, collecting herself and sitting back down in the copilot’s seat.

“I’m the kind of guy that kills nobles and frees slaves when I finally snap. That’s who I am,” Raziel said, his voice betraying his years, making him sound every bit of his fifty some years. “And I’m very proud of that.”